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*American Dramatists Series*

# Thirst

And Other One-Act Plays

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Eugene O. O'Neill

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*American Dramatists Series*

# THIRST

*And Other One Act Plays by*

EUGENE G. O'NEILL



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# THIRST

A PLAY IN ONE ACT

## *CHARACTERS*

*A Gentleman*

*A Dancer*

*A West Indian Mulatto Sailor*



# THIRST

## A TRAGEDY IN ONE ACT

*Scene—A steamer's life raft rising and falling slowly on the long ground-swell of a glassy tropic sea. The sky above is pitilessly clear, of a steel blue color merging into black shadow on the horizon's rim. The sun glares down from straight overhead like a great angry eye of God. The heat is terrific. Writhing, fantastic heat-waves rise from the white deck of the raft. Here and there on the still surface of the sea the fins of sharks may be seen slowly cutting the surface of the water in lazy circles.*

*Two men and a woman are on the raft. Seated at one end is a West Indian mulatto dressed in the blue uniform of a sailor. Across his jersey may be seen the words "Union Mail Line" in red letters. He has on rough sailor shoes. His head is bare. When he speaks it is in drawling sing-song tones as if he were troubled by some strange impediment of speech. He croons a monotonous negro song to himself as his round eyes follow the shark fins in their everlasting circles.*

*At the other end of the raft sits a middle-aged*

*white man in what was once an evening dress; but sun and salt water have reduced it to the mere caricature of such a garment. His white shirt is stained and rumpled; his collar a formless pulp about his neck; his black tie a withered ribbon. Evidently he had been a first-class passenger. Just now he cuts a sorry and pitiful figure as he sits staring stupidly at the water with unseeing eyes. His scanty black hair is disheveled, revealing a bald spot burnt crimson by the sun. A mustache droops over his lips, and some of the dye has run off it making a black line down the side of his lean face, blistered with sunburn, haggard with hunger and thirst. From time to time he licks his swollen lips with his blackened tongue.*

*Between the two men a young woman lies with arms outstretched, face downward on the raft. She is even a more bizarre figure than the man in evening clothes, for she is dressed in a complete short-skirted dancer's costume of black velvet covered with spangles. Her long blond hair streams down over her bare, unprotected shoulders. Her silk stockings are baggy and wrinkled and her dancing shoes swollen and misshapen. When she lifts her head a diamond necklace can be seen glittering coldly on the protruding collar-bones of her emaciated shoulders. Continuous weeping has made a blurred smudge of her rouge and the black make-up of her eyes but*

*one can still see that she must have been very beautiful before hunger and thirst had transformed her into a mocking spectre of a dancer. She is sobbing endlessly, hopelessly.*

*In the eyes of all three the light of a dawning madness is shining.*

THE DANCER—(*Raising herself to a sitting posture and turning piteously to the Gentleman.*) "My God! My God! This silence is driving me mad! Why do you not speak to me? Is there no ship in sight yet?"

THE GENTLEMAN—(*Dully.*) "No. I do not think so. At least I cannot see any." (*He tries to rise to his feet but finds himself too weak and sits down again with a groan.*) "If I could only stand up I could tell better. I cannot see far from this position. I am so near the water. And then my eyes are like two balls of fire. They burn and burn until they feel as if they were boring into my brain."

THE DANCER—"I know! I know! Everywhere I look I see great crimson spots. It is as if the sky were raining drops of blood. Do you see them too?"

THE GENTLEMAN—"Yesterday I did—or some day—I no longer remember days. But to-day everything is red. The very sea itself seems changed to blood." (*He licks his swollen, cracked lips*

—*then laughs—the shrill cackle of madness.*) “Perhaps it is the blood of all those who were drowned that night rising to the surface.”

THE DANCER—“Do not say such things. You are horrible. I do not care to listen to you.” (*She turns away from him with a shudder.*)

THE GENTLEMAN—(*Sulkily.*) “Very well. I will not speak.” (*He covers his face with his hands.*) “God! God! How my eyes ache! How my throat burns!” (*He sobs heavily—there is a pause—suddenly he turns to the Dancer angrily.*) “Why did you ask me to speak if you do not care to listen to me?”

THE DANCER—“I did not ask you to speak of blood. I did not ask you to mention that night.”

THE GENTLEMAN—“Well, I will say no more then. You may talk to him if you wish.” (*He points to the sailor with a sneer. The negro does not hear. He is crooning to himself and watching the sharks. There is a long pause. The raft slowly rises and falls on the long swells. The sun blazes down.*)

THE DANCER—(*Almost shrieking.*) “Oh, this silence! I cannot bear this silence. Talk to me about anything you please but, for God sake, talk to me! I must not think! I must not think!”

THE GENTLEMAN—(*Remorsefully.*) “Your pardon, dear lady! I am afraid I spoke harshly. I

am not myself. I think I am a little out of my head. There is so much sun and so much sea. Everything gets vague at times. I am very weak. We have not eaten in so long—we have not even had a drink of water in so long." (*Then in tones of great anguish.*) "Oh, if we only had some water!"

THE DANCER—(*Flinging herself on the raft and beating it with clenched fists.*) "Please do not speak of water!"

THE SAILOR—(*Stopping his song abruptly and turning quickly around.*) "Water? Who's got water?" (*His swollen tongue shows between his dry lips.*)

THE GENTLEMAN—(*Turning to the Sailor.*) "You know no one here has any water. You stole the last drop we had yourself." (*Irritably.*) "Why do you ask such questions?" (*The Sailor turns his back again and watches the shark fins. He does not answer nor does he sing any longer. There is a silence, profound and breathless.*)

THE DANCER—(*Creeping over to the Gentleman and seizing his arm.*) "Do you not notice how deep the silence is? The world seems emptier than ever. I am afraid. Tell me why it is."

THE GENTLEMAN—"I, too, notice it. But I do not know why it is."

THE DANCER—"Ah! I know now. He is silent. Do you not remember he was singing? A queer



monotonous song it was—more of a dirge than a song. I have heard many songs in many languages in the places I have played, but never a song like that before. Why did he stop, do you think? Maybe something frightened him.”

THE GENTLEMAN—“I do not know. But I will ask him.” (*To the Sailor.*) “Why have you stopped singing?” (*The Sailor looks at him with a strange expression in his eyes. He does not answer but turns to the circling fins again and takes up his song, dully, droningly, as if from some place he had left off. The Dancer and the Gentleman listen in attitudes of strained attention for a long time.*)

THE DANCER—(*Laughing hysterically.*) “What a song! There is no tune to it and I can understand no words. I wonder what it means.”

THE GENTLEMAN—“Who knows? It is doubtless some folk song of his people which he is singing.”

THE DANCER—“But I wish to find out. Sailor! Will you tell me what it means—that song you are singing?” (*The negro stares at her uneasily for a moment.*)

THE SAILOR—(*Drawingly.*) “It is a song of my people.”

THE DANCER—“Yes. But what do the words mean?”

THE SAILOR—(*Pointing to the shark fins.*) “I

am singing to them. It is a charm. I have been told it is very strong. If I sing long enough they will not eat us."

THE DANCER—(*Terrified.*) "Eat us? What will eat us?"

THE GENTLEMAN—(*Pointing to the moving fins in the still water.*) "He means the sharks. Those pointed black things you see moving through the water are their fins. Have you not noticed them before?"

THE DANCER—"Yes, yes. I have seen them. But I did not know they were sharks." (*Sobbing.*) "Oh it is horrible, all this!"

THE GENTLEMAN—(*To the negro, harshly.*) "Why do you tell her such things? Do you not know you will frighten her?"

THE SAILOR—(*Dully.*) "She asked me what I was singing."

THE GENTLEMAN—(*Trying to comfort the Dancer who is still sobbing.*) "At least tell her the truth about the sharks. That is all a children's tale about them eating people." (*Raising his voice.*) "You know they never eat anyone. And I know it." (*The negro looks at him and his lips contract grotesquely. Perhaps he is trying to smile.*)

THE DANCER—(*Raising her head and drying her eyes.*) "You are sure of what you say?"

THE GENTLEMAN—(*Confused by the negro's*

stare.) "Of course I am sure. Everyone knows that sharks are afraid to touch a person. They are all cowards." (*To the negro.*) "You were just trying to frighten the lady, were you not?" (*The negro turns away from them and stares at the sea. He commences to sing again.*)

THE DANCER—"I no longer like his song. It makes me dream of horrible things. Tell him to stop."

THE GENTLEMAN—"Bah! You are nervous. Anything is better than dead silence."

THE DANCER—"Yes. Anything is better than silence—even a song like that."

THE GENTLEMAN—"He is strange—that sailor. I do not know what to think of him."

THE DANCER—"It is a strange song he sings."

THE GENTLEMAN—"He does not seem to want to speak to us."

THE DANCER—"I have noticed that, too. When I asked him about the song he did not want to answer at all."

THE GENTLEMAN—"Yet he speaks good English. It cannot be that he does not understand us."

THE DANCER—"When he does speak it is as if he had some impediment in his throat."

THE GENTLEMAN—"Perhaps he has. If so, he is much to be pitied and we are wrong to speak of him so."

THE DANCER—"I do not pity him. I am afraid of him."

THE GENTLEMAN—"That is foolish. It is the sun which beats down so fiercely which makes you have such thoughts. I, also, have been afraid of him at times, but I know now that I had been gazing at the sea too long and listening to the great silence. Such things distort your brain."

THE DANCER—"Then you no longer fear him?"

THE GENTLEMAN—"I no longer fear him now that I am quite sane. It clears my brain to talk to you. We must talk to each other all the time."

THE DANCER—"Yes, we must talk to each other. I do not dream when I talk to you."

THE GENTLEMAN—"I think at one time I was going mad. I dreamed he had a knife in his hand and looked at me. But it was all madness; I can see that now. He is only a poor negro sailor—our companion in misfortune. God knows we are all in the same pitiful plight. We should not grow suspicious of one another."

THE DANCER—"All the same, I am afraid of him. There is something in his eyes when he looks at me, which makes me tremble."

THE GENTLEMAN—"There is nothing I tell you. It is all your imagination." (*There is a long pause.*)

THE DANCER—"Good God! Is there no ship

in sight yet?"

THE GENTLEMAN—(*Attempting to rise but falling back weakly.*) "I can see none. And I cannot stand to get a wider view."

THE DANCER—(*Pointing to the negro.*) "Ask him. He is stronger than we are. He may be able to see one."

THE GENTLEMAN—"Sailor!" (*The negro ceases his chant and turns to him with expressionless eyes.*) "You are stronger than we are and can see farther. Stand up and tell me if there is any ship in sight."

THE SAILOR—(*Rising slowly to his feet and looking at all points of the horizon.*) "No. There is none." (*He sits down again and croons his dreary melody.*)

THE DANCER—(*Weeping hopelessly.*) "My God, this is horrible. To wait and wait for something that never comes."

THE GENTLEMAN—"It is indeed horrible. But it is to be expected."

THE DANCER—"Why do you say it is to be expected? Have you no hopes, then, of being rescued?"

THE GENTLEMAN—(*Wearily.*) "I have hoped for many things in my life. Always I have hoped in vain. We are far out of the beaten track of steamers. I know little of navigation, yet I heard those on board say that we were following a course

but little used. Why we did so, I do not know. I suppose the Captain wished to make a quicker passage. He alone knows what was in his mind and he will probably never tell."

THE DANCER—"No, he will never tell."

THE GENTLEMAN—"Why do you speak so decidedly? He might have been among those who escaped in the boats."

THE DANCER—"He did not escape. He is dead!"

THE GENTLEMAN—"Dead?"

THE DANCER—"Yes. He was on the bridge. I can remember seeing his face as he stood in under a lamp. It was pale and drawn like the face of a dead man. His eyes, too, seemed dead. He shouted some orders in a thin trembling voice. No one paid any attention to him. And then he shot himself. I saw the flash, and heard the report above all the screams of the drowning. Some one grasped me by the arm and I heard a hoarse voice shouting in my ear. Then I fainted."

THE GENTLEMAN—"Poor Captain! It is evident, then, that he felt himself guilty—since he killed himself. It must be terrible to hear the screams of the dying and know oneself to blame. I do not wonder that he killed himself."

THE DANCER—"He was so kind and good-natured—the Captain. It was only that afternoon on

the promenade deck that he stopped beside my chair. 'I hear you are to entertain us this evening' he said. 'That will be delightful, and it is very kind of you. I had promised myself the pleasure of seeing you in New York, but you have forestalled me.' " (After a pause.) "How handsome and broad-shouldered he was—the Captain."

THE GENTLEMAN—"I would have liked to have seen his soul."

THE DANCER—"You would have found it no better and no worse than the souls of other men. If he was guilty he has paid with his life."

THE GENTLEMAN—"No. He has avoided payment by taking his life. The dead do not pay."

THE DANCER—"And the dead cannot answer when we speak evil of them. All we can know is that he is dead. Let us talk of other things." (There is a pause.)

THE GENTLEMAN—(*Fumbles in the inside pocket of his dress coat and pulls out a black object that looks like a large card case. He opens it and stares at it with perplexed eyes. Then, giving a hollow laugh, he holds it over for the Dancer to see.*) "Oh, the damned irony of it!"

THE DANCER—"What is it? I cannot read very well. My eyes ache so."

THE GENTLEMAN—(*Still laughing mockingly.*) "Bend closer! Bend closer! It is worth while un-

derstanding—the joke that has been played on me.”

THE DANCER—(*Reading slowly, her face almost touching the case.*) “United States Club of Buenos Aires! I do not understand what the joke is.”

THE GENTLEMAN—(*Impatiently snatching the case from her hand.*) “I will explain the joke to you then. Listen! M-e-n-u—menu. That is the joke. This is a souvenir menu of a banquet given in my honor by this Club.” (*Reading.*) “‘Martini cocktails, soup, sherry, fish, Burgundy, chicken, champagne’—and here we are dying for a crust of bread, for a drink of water!” (*His mad laughter suddenly ceases and in a frenzy of rage he shakes his fist at the sky and screams.*) “God! God! What a joke to play on us!” (*After this outburst he sinks back dejectedly, his trembling hand still clutching the menu.*)

THE DANCER—(*Sobbing.*) “This is too horrible. What have we done that we should suffer so? It is as if one misfortune after another happened to make our agony more terrible. Throw that thing away! The very sight of it is a mockery.” (*The Gentleman throws the menu into the sea where it floats, a black spot on the glassy water.*) “How do you happen to have that thing with you? It is ghastly for you to torment me by reading it.”

THE GENTLEMAN—“I am sorry to have hurt



you. The jest was so grotesque I could not keep it to myself. You ask how I happen to have it with me? I will tell you. It gives the joke an even bitterer flavor. You remember when the crash came? We were all in the salon. You were singing—a Cockney song I think?"

THE DANCER—"Yes. It is one I first sang at the Palace in London."

THE GENTLEMAN—"It was in the salon. You were singing. You were very beautiful. I remember a woman on my right saying: 'How pretty she is! I wonder if she is married?' Strange how some idiotic remark like that will stick in one's brain when all else is vague and confused. A tragedy happens—we are in the midst of it—and one of our clearest remembrances afterwards is a remark that might have been overheard in any subway train."

THE DANCER—"It is so with me. There was a fat, bald-headed, little man. It was on deck after the crash. Everywhere they were fighting to get into the boats. This poor little man stood by himself. His moon face was convulsed with rage. He kept repeating in loud angry tones: 'I shall be late. I must cable! I can never make it!' He was still bewailing his broken appointment when a rush of the crowd swept him off his feet and into the sea. I can see him now. He is the only person besides the Captain I remember clearly."

THE GENTLEMAN—(*Continuing his story in a dead voice.*) "You were very beautiful. I was looking at you and wondering what kind of a woman you were. You know I had never met you personally—only seen you in my walks around the deck. Then came the crash—that horrible dull crash. We were all thrown forward on the floor of the salon; then screams, oaths, fainting women, the hollow boom of a bulkhead giving way. I vaguely remember rushing to my stateroom and picking up my wallet. It must have been that menu that I took instead. Then I was on deck fighting in the midst of the crowd. Somehow I got into a boat—but it was overloaded and was swamped immediately. I swam to another boat. They beat me off with the oars. That boat too was swamped a moment later. And then the gurgling, choking cries of the drowning! Something huge rushed by me in the water leaving a gleaming trail of phosphorescence. A woman near me with a life belt around her gave a cry of agony and disappeared—then I realized—sharks! I became frenzied with terror. I swam. I beat the water with my hands. The ship had gone down. I swam and swam with but one idea—to put all that horror behind me. I saw something white on the water before me. I clutched it—climbed on it. It was this raft. You and he were on it. I fainted. The whole thing is a hor-

rible nightmare in my brain—but I remember clearly that idiotic remark of the woman in the salon. What pitiful creatures we are!”

THE DANCER—“When the crash came I also rushed to my stateroom. I took this, (*Pointing to the diamond necklace.*) clasped it round my neck and ran on deck; the rest I have told you.”

THE GENTLEMAN—“Do you not remember how you came on this raft? It is strange that you and he should be on a raft alone when so many died for lack of a place. Were there ever any others on the raft with you?”

THE DANCER—“No, I am sure there were not. Everything in my memory is blurred. But I feel sure we were always the only ones—until you came. I was afraid of you—your face was livid with fear. You were moaning to yourself.”

THE GENTLEMAN—“It was the sharks. Until they came I kept a half-control over myself. But when I saw them even my soul quivered with terror.”

THE DANCER—(*Horror-stricken, looking at the circling fins.*) “Sharks! Why they are all around us now.” (*Frenziedly.*) “You lied to me. You said they would not touch us. Oh, I am afraid, I am afraid!” (*She covers her face with her hands.*)

THE GENTLEMAN—“If I lied to you it was because I wished to spare you. Be brave! We are

safe from them as long as we stay on the raft. These things must be faced." (*Then in tones of utter despondency.*) "Besides, what does it matter?—sharks or no sharks—the end is the same."

THE DANCER—(*Taking her hands away from her eyes and looking dully at the water.*). "You are right. What does it matter?"

THE GENTLEMAN—"God! How still the sea is! How still the sky is! One would say the world was dead. I think the accursed humming of that nigger only makes one feel the silence more keenly. There is nothing—but the sharks—that seems to live."

THE DANCER—"How the sun burns into me! (*Piteously.*). "My poor skin that I was once so proud of!"

THE GENTLEMAN—(*Rousing himself with an effort.*) "Come! Let us not think about it. It is madness to think about it so. How do you account for your being on the raft alone with this nigger? You have not yet told me."

THE DANCER—"How can I tell? The last thing I remember was that harsh voice in my ear shouting something—what, I cannot recollect."

THE GENTLEMAN—"There was nothing else?"

THE DANCER—"Nothing. (*Pause.*) Stop! Yes, there was something I had forgotten. I think that someone kissed me. Yes, I am sure that some-

one kissed me. But no, I am not sure. It may have all been a dream I dreamed. I have had so many dreams during these awful days and nights—so many mad, mad dreams. (*Her eyes begin to glaze, her lips to twitch. She murmurs to herself.*) "Mad, mad dreams."

THE GENTLEMAN—(*Reaching over and shaking her by the shoulder.*) "Come! You said someone kissed you. You must be mistaken. I surely did not, and it could hardly have been that sailor."

THE DANCER—"Yet I am sure someone did. It was not since I have been on this raft. It was on the deck of the ship just as I was fainting."

THE GENTLEMAN—"Who could it have been, do you think?"

THE DANCER—"I hardly dare to say what I think. I might be wrong. You remember the Second Officer—the young Englishman with the great dark eyes who was so tall and handsome? All the women loved him. I, too, I loved him—a little bit. He loved me—very much—so he said. Yes, I know he loved me very much. I think it was he who kissed me. I am almost sure it was he."

THE GENTLEMAN—"Yes, he must have been the one. That would explain it all. He must have sent away the raft when only you and this sailor were on it. He probably did not let the others know of the existence of this raft. Indeed he must

have loved you to disregard his duty so. I will ask the sailor about it. Maybe he can clear away our doubts." (*To the negro.*) "Sailor! (*The negro stops singing and looks at them with wide, blood-shot eyes.*) "Did the Second Officer order you to take this lady away from the ship?"

THE SAILOR—(*Sullenly.*) "I do not know."

THE GENTLEMAN—"Did he tell you to take no one else with you but this lady—and perhaps himself afterwards?"

THE SAILOR—(*Angrily.*) "I do not know."  
(*He turns away again and commences to sing.*)

THE DANCER—"Do not speak to him any more. He is angry at something. He will not answer."

THE GENTLEMAN—"He is going mad I think. However it seems certain that it was the Second Officer who kissed you and saved your life."

THE DANCER—"He was kind and brave to me. He meant well. Yet I wish now he had let me die. I would have been way down in the cold green water. I would have been sleeping, coldly sleeping. While now my brain is scorched with sun-fire and dream-fire. And I am going mad. We are all going mad. Your eyes shine with a wild flame at times—and that Sailor's are horrible with strangeness—and mine see great drops of blood that dance upon the sea. Yes we are all mad." (*Pause.*) "God! Oh God! Must this be the end of all?"

I was coming home, home after years of struggling, home to success and fame and money. And I must die out here on a raft like a mad dog." (*She weeps despairingly.*)

THE GENTLEMAN—"Be still! You must not despair so. I, too, might whine a prayer of protest: 'Oh God, God! After twenty years of incessant grind, day after weary day, I started on my first vacation. I was going home. And here I sit dying by slow degrees, desolate and forsaken. Is this the meaning of all my years of labor? Is this the end, oh God?' So I might wail with equal justice. But the blind sky will not answer your appeals or mine. Nor will the cruel sea grow merciful for any prayer of ours."

THE DANCER—"Have you no hope that one of the ship's boats may have reached land and reported the disaster. They would surely send steamers out to search for the other survivors."

THE GENTLEMAN—"We have drifted far, very far, in these long weary days. I am afraid no steamer would find us."

THE DANCER—"We are lost then!" (*She falls face downward on the raft. A great sob shakes her thin bare shoulders.*)

THE GENTLEMAN—"I have not given up hope. These seas, I have heard, are full of coral islands and we surely ought to drift near one of them soon.

It was probably an uncharted coral reef that our steamer hit. I heard someone say 'derelict' but I saw no sign of one in the water. With us it is only a question of whether we can hold out until we sight land." (*His voice quivers; he licks his blackened lips. His eyes have grown very mad and he is shaking spasmodically from head to foot.*) "Water would save us—just a little water—even a few drops would be enough." (*Intensely.*) "God, if we only had a little water!"

THE DANCER—"Perhaps there will be water on the island. Look; look hard! An island or a ship may have come in sight while we were talking." (*There is a pause. Suddenly she rises to her knees and pointing straight in front of her shouts.*) "See! An island!"

THE GENTLEMAN—(*Shading his eyes with a trembling hand and peering wildly around him.*) "I see nothing—nothing but a red sea and a red sky."

THE DANCER—(*Still looking at some point far out over the water, speaks in disappointed tones.*) "It is gone. Yet I am quite sure I saw one. It was right out there quite near to us. It was all green and clean looking with a clear stream that ran into the sea. I could hear the water running over the stones. You do not believe me. You, Sailor, you must have seen it too, did you not?" (*The negro*



*does not answer.*) "I cannot see it any more. Yet I must see it. I *will* see it!"

THE GENTLEMAN—(*Shaking her by the shoulder.*) "What you say is nonsense. There is no island there I tell you. There is nothing but sun and sky and sea around us. There are no green trees. There is no water." (*The Sailor has stopped singing and turns and looks at them.*)

THE DANCER—(*Angrily.*) "Do you mean to tell me I lie? Can I not believe my own eyes, then? I tell you I saw it—cool clear water. I heard it bubbling over the stones. But now I hear nothing, nothing at all." (*Turning suddenly to the Sailor.*) "Why have you stopped singing? Is not everything awful enough already that you should make it worse?"

THE SAILOR—(*Sticking out his swollen tongue and pointing to it with a long, brown finger.*) "Water! I want water! Give me some water and I will sing."

THE GENTLEMAN—(*Furiously.*) "We have no water, fool! It is your fault we have none. Why did you drink all that was left in the cask when you thought we were asleep? I would not give you any even if we had some. You deserve to suffer, you pig! If anyone of the three of us has any water it is you who have hidden some out of what you stole." (*With a laugh of mad cunning.*)

"But you will get no chance to drink it, I promise you that. I am watching you." (*The negro sullenly turns away from them.*)

THE DANCER—(*Taking hold of the Gentleman's arm and almost hissing into his ear. She is terribly excited and he is still chuckling crazily to himself.*) "Do you really think he has some?"

THE GENTLEMAN—(*Chuckling.*) "He may have. He may have."

THE DANCER—"Why do you say that?"

THE GENTLEMAN—"He has been acting strangely. He has looked as if he wished to hide something. I was wondering what it could be. Then suddenly I thought to myself: 'What if it should be some of the water?' Then I knew I had found him out. I will not let him get the best of me. I will watch him. He will not drink while I am watching him. I will watch him as long as I can see."

THE DANCER—"What could he have put the water in? He has nothing that I can discover." (*She is rapidly falling in with this mad fixed idea of his.*)

THE GENTLEMAN—"Who knows? He may have a flask hidden in under his jersey. But he has something, that I am sure of. Why is it he is so much stronger than we are? He can stand up without effort and we can scarcely move. Why

is that, I ask you?"

THE DANCER—"It is true. He stood up and looked for a ship as easily as if he had never known hunger and thirst. You are right. He must have something hidden—food or water."

THE GENTLEMAN—(*With mad eagerness to prove his fixed idea.*) "No, he has no food. There has never been any food. But there has been water. There was a whole small cask full of it on the raft when I came. On the second or third night, I do not remember which, I awoke and saw him draining the cask. When I reached it, it was empty." (*Furiously shaking his fist at the negro's back.*) "Oh you pig! You rotten pig!" (*The negro does not seem to hear.*)

THE DANCER—"That water would have saved our lives. He is no better than a murderer."

THE GENTLEMAN—(*With insane shrewdness.*) "Listen. I think he must have poured some of the water into his flask. There was quite a little there. He could not have drunk it all. Oh, he is a cunning one! That song of his—it was only a blind. He drinks when we are not looking. But he will drink no more for I will watch him. I will watch him!"

THE DANCER—"You will watch him? And what good will that do either of us? Will we die any the less soon for your watching? No! Let us

get the water away from him in some way. That is the only thing to do."

THE GENTLEMAN—"He will not give it to us."

THE DANCER—"We will steal it while he sleeps."

THE GENTLEMAN—"I do not think he sleeps. I have never seen him sleep. Beside we should wake him."

THE DANCER—(*Violently.*) "We will kill him then. He deserves to be killed."

THE GENTLEMAN—"He is stronger than we are—and he has a knife. No, we cannot do that. I would willingly kill him. As you say, he deserves it. But I cannot even stand. I have no strength left. I have no weapons. He would laugh at me."

THE DANCER—"There must be some way. You would think even the most heartless savage would share at a time like this. We must get that water. It is horrible to be dying of thirst with water so near. Think! Think! Is there no way?"

THE GENTLEMAN—"You might buy it from him with that necklace of yours. I have heard his people are very fond of such things."

THE DANCER—"This necklace? It is worth a thousand pounds. An English duke gave it to me. I will not part with it. Do you think I am a fool?"

THE GENTLEMAN—"Think of a drink of water!" (*They both lick their dry lips feverishly.*)

"If we do not drink soon we will die." (*Laughing harshly.*) "You will take your necklace to the sharks with you? Very well then, I will say no more. For my part, I would sell my soul for a drop of water."

THE DANCER—(*Shuddering with horror she glances instinctively at the moving shark fins.*) "You are horrible. I had almost forgotten those monsters. It is not kind of you to be always bringing them back to my memory."

THE GENTLEMAN—"It is well that you should not forget them. You will value your Duke's present less when you look at them." (*Impatiently pounding the deck with one boney hand.*) "Come, come, we shall both die of thirst while you are dreaming. Offer it to him! Offer it to him!"

THE DANCER—(*She takes off the necklace and, musing vacantly, turns it over in her hands watching it sparkle in the sun.*) "It is beautiful, is it not? I hate to part with it. He was very much in love with me—the old Duke. I think he would even have married me in the end. I did not like him. He was old, very old. Something came up—I forget what. I never saw him again. This is the only gift of his that I have left."

THE GENTLEMAN—(*In a frenzy of impatience—the vision of the water clear before his glaring eyes.*) "Damn it, why are you chattering so? Think

of the water he has got. Offer it to him! Offer it to him!"

THE DANCER—"Yes, yes, my throat is burning up; my eyes are on fire. I must have the water."  
*(She drags herself on hands and knees across the raft to where the negro is sitting. He does not notice her approach. She reaches out a trembling hand and touches him on the back. He turns slowly and looks at her, his round, animal eyes dull and lusterless. She holds the necklace out in her right hand before his face and speaks hurriedly in a husky voice.)* "Look, you have stolen our water. You deserve to be killed. We will forget all that. Look at this necklace. It was given to me by an English Duke—a nobleman. It is worth a thousand pounds—five thousand dollars. It will provide for you for the rest of your life. You need not be a sailor any more. You need never work at all any more. Do you understand what that means?" *(The negro does not answer. The Dancer hurries on however, her words pouring out in a sing-song jumble.)* "That water that you stole—well, I will give you this necklace—they are all real diamonds, you know—five thousand dollars—for that water. You need not give me all of it. I am not unreasonable. You may keep some for yourself. I would not have you die. I want just enough for myself and my friend—to keep us alive until we reach some island.

My lips are cracked with heat! My head is bursting! Here, take the necklace. It is yours." (*She tries to force it into his hand. He pushes her hand away and the necklace falls to the deck of the raft where it lies glittering among the heat waves.*)

THE DANCER—(*Her voice raised stridently.*) "Give me the water! I have given you the necklace. Give me the water!" (*The Gentleman, who has been watching her with anxious eyes, also cries.*) "Yes. Give her the water!"

THE SAILOR—(*His voice drawling and without expression.*) "I have no water."

THE DANCER—"Oh, you are cruel! Why do you lie? You see me suffering so and yet you lie to me. I have given you the necklace. It is worth five thousand dollars, do you understand? Surely for five thousand dollars you will give me a drink of water!"

THE SAILOR—"I have no water, I tell you." (*He turns his back to her. She crawls over to the Gentleman and lies beside him, sobbing brokenly.*)

THE GENTLEMAN—(*His face convulsed with rage, shaking both fists in the air.*) "The pig! The pig! The black dog!"

THE DANCER—(*Sitting up and wiping her eyes.*) "Well, you have heard him. He will not give it to us. Maybe he only has a little and is afraid to share it. What shall we do now? What

can we do?"

THE GENTLEMAN—(*Despondently.*) "Nothing. He is stronger than we are. There is no wind. We will never reach an island. We can die, that is all." (*He sinks back and buries his head in his hands. A great dry sob shakes his shoulders.*)

THE DANCER—(*Her eyes flaming with a sudden resolution.*) "Ah, who is the coward now? You have given up hope, it seems. Well, I have not. I have still one chance. It has never failed me yet."

THE GENTLEMAN—(*Raising his head and looking at her in amazement.*) "You are going to offer him more money?"

THE DANCER—(*With a strange smile.*) "No. Not that. I will offer more than money. We shall get our water." (*She tears a piece of crumpled lace off the front of her costume and carefully wipes her face with it as if she were using a powder-puff.*)

THE GENTLEMAN—(*Watching her stupidly.*) "I do not understand."

THE DANCER—(*She pulls up her stockings—tries to smooth the wrinkles out of her dress—then takes her long hair and having braided it, winds it into a coil around her head. She pinches her cheeks, already crimson with sunburn. Then turning coquettishly to the Gentleman, she says.*) "There!



Do I not look better? How do I look?"

THE GENTLEMAN—(*Bursting into a mad guffaw.*) "You look terrible! You are hideous!"

THE DANCER—"You lie! I am beautiful. Everyone knows I am beautiful. You yourself have said so. It is you who are hideous. You are jealous of me. I will not give you any water."

THE GENTLEMAN—"You will get no water. You are frightful. What is it you would do—dance for him?" (*Mockingly.*) "Dance! Dance Salome! I will be the orchestra. He will be the gallery. We will both applaud you madly." (*He leans on one elbow and watches her, chuckling to himself.*)

THE DANCER—(*Turning from him furiously and crawling on her knees over to the sailor, calls in her most seductive voice.*) "Sailor! Sailor! (*He does not seem to hear—she takes his arm and shakes it gently—he turns around and stares wonderingly at her.*) "Listen to me, Sailor. What is your name—your first name?" (*She smiles enticingly at him. He does not answer.*) "You will not tell me then? You are angry at me, are you not? I cannot blame you. I have called you bad names. I am sorry, very sorry." (*Indicating the Gentleman who has ceased to notice them and is staring at the horizon with blinking eyes.*) "It was he who put such ideas into my head. He does not like you. Neither

did I, but I see now that you are the better of the two. I hate him! He has said dreadful things which I cannot forgive." (*Putting her hand on his shoulder she bends forward with her golden hair almost in his lap and smiles up into his face.*) "I like you, Sailor. You are big and strong. We are going to be great friends, are we not?" (*The negro is hardly looking at her. He is watching the sharks.*) "Surely you will not refuse me a little sip of your water?"

THE SAILOR—"I have no water."

THE DANCER—"Oh, why will you keep up this subterfuge? Am I not offering you price enough?" (*Putting her arm around his neck and half whispering in his ear.*) "Do you not understand? I will love you, Sailor! Noblemen and millionaires and all degrees of gentleman have loved me, have fought for me. I have never loved any of them as I will love you. Look in my eyes, Sailor, look in my eyes!" (*Compelled in spite of himself by something in her voice, the negro gazes deep into her eyes. For a second his nostrils dilate—he draws in his breath with a hissing sound—his body grows tense and it seems as if he is about to sweep her into his arms. Then his expression grows apathetic again. He turns to the sharks.*)

THE DANCER—"Oh, will you never understand? Are you so stupid that you do not know

what I mean? Look! I am offering myself to you! I am kneeling before you—I who always had men kneel to me! I am offering my body to you—my body that men have called so beautiful. I have promised to love *you*—a negro sailor—if you will give me one small drink of water. Is that not humiliation enough that you must keep me waiting so?" (*Raising her voice.*) "Answer me! Answer me! Will you give me that water?"

THE SAILOR—(*Without even turning to look at her.*) "I have no water."

THE DANCER—(*Shaking with fury.*) "Great God, have I abased myself for this? Have I humbled myself before this black animal only to be spurned like a wench of the streets. It is too much! You lie, you dirty slave! You have water. You have stolen my share of the water." (*In a frenzy she clutches the sailor about the throat with both hands.*) "Give it to me! Give it to me!"

THE SAILOR—(*Takes her hands from his neck and pushes her roughly away. She falls face downward in the middle of the raft.*) "Let me alone! I have no water."

THE GENTLEMAN—(*Aroused from the stupor he has been in.*) "What is it? I was dreaming I was sitting before great tumblers of ice-water. They were just beyond my reach. I tried and tried to get one of them. It was horrible. But what has

happened here? What is the matter?" (*No one answers him. The negro is watching the sharks again. The Dancer is lying in a huddled heap, moaning to herself. Suddenly she jumps to her feet. All her former weakness seems quite gone. She stands swaying a little with the roll of the raft. Her eyes have a terrible glare in them. They seem bursting out of her head. She mutters incoherently to herself. The last string has snapped. She is mad.*)

THE DANCER—(*Smoothing her dress over her hips and looking before her as if in a mirror.*) "Quick, Marie! You are so slow to-night. I will be late. Did you not hear the bell? I am the next on. Did he send any flowers to-night, Marie? Good, he will be in a stage box. I will smile at him, the poor old fool. He will marry me some day and I will be a Duchess. Think of that Marie—a real Duchess! Yes, yes I am coming! You need not hold the curtain." (*She drops her head on her breast and mutters to herself. The Gentleman has been watching her, at first in astonishment, then in a sort of crazy appreciation. When she stops talking he claps his hands.*)

THE GENTLEMAN—"Go on! Go on! It is as good as a play." (*He bursts into cackling laughter.*)

THE DANCER—"They are laughing. It cannot

be at me. How hot it is! How the footlights glare! I shall be glad to get away to-night. I am very thirsty." (*Passing her hand across her eyes.*) "There he is in the box—the poor, old duke. I will wave to him." (*She waves her hand in the air.*) "He is kind to me. It is a pity he is so old. What song is it I am to sing? Oh yes." (*She sings the last few lines of some music ball ballad in a harsh cracked voice. The negro turns and looks at her wonderingly. The Gentleman claps his hands.*) "They are applauding. I must dance for them!" (*She commences to dance on the swaying surface of the raft, half-stumbling every now and then. Her hair falls down. She is like some ghastly marionette jerked by invisible wires. She dances faster and faster. Her arms and legs fly grotesquely around as if beyond control.*) "Oh, how hot it is!" (*She grasps the front of her bodice in both hands and rips it over her shoulders. It hangs down in back. She is almost naked to the waist. Her breasts are withered and shrunken by starvation. She kicks first one foot and then the other frenziedly in the air.*) "Oh it is hot! I am stifling. Bring me a drink of water! I am choking!" (*She falls back on the raft. A shudder runs over her whole body. A little crimson foam appears on her lips. Her eyes glaze. The wild stare leaves them. She is dead.*)

THE GENTLEMAN—(*Laughing insanely and clapping his hands.*) "Bravo! Bravo! Give us some more!" (*There is no answer. A great stillness hangs over everything. The heat waves rising from the raft near the woman's body seem like her soul departing into the great unknown. A look of fear appears on the Gentleman's face. The negro wears a strange expression. One might say he looked relieved, even glad, as if some perplexing problem has been solved for him.*)

THE GENTLEMAN—"She does not answer me. She must be sick." (*He crawls over to her.*) "She has fainted." (*He puts his hand on her left breast—then bends and rests his ear over her heart. His face grows livid in spite of the sunburn.*) "My God! She is dead! Poor girl! Poor Girl!" (*He whimpers weakly to himself, mechanically running her long golden hair through his fingers with a caressing gesture. He is startled when he hears the negro's voice.*)

THE SAILOR—"Is she dead?"

THE GENTLEMAN—"Yes. She is dead, poor girl. Her heart no longer beats."

THE SAILOR—"She is better off. She does not suffer now. One of us had to die." (*After a pause.*) "It is lucky for us she is dead."

THE GENTLEMAN—"What do you mean? What good can her death do us?"

THE SAILOR—"We will live now." (*He takes his sailor's knife from its sheath and sharpens it on the sole of his shoe. While he is doing this he sings—a happy negro melody that mocks the great silence.*)

THE GENTLEMAN—(*In hushed, frightened tones.*) "I do not understand."

THE SAILOR—(*His swollen lips parting in a grin as he points with his knife to the body of the Dancer.*) "We shall eat. We shall drink."

THE GENTLEMAN—(*For a moment struck dumb with loathing—then in tones of anguished horror.*) "No! No! No! Good God, not that!" (*With a swift movement he grasps the Dancer's body with both hands and making a tremendous effort, pushes it into the water. There is a swift rush of waiting fins. The sea near the raft is churned into foam. The Dancer's body disappears in a swirling eddy; then all is quiet again. A black stain appears on the surface of the water.*)

The Sailor, who has jumped forward to save the body, gives a harsh cry of disappointed rage and, knife in hand, springs on the Gentleman and drives the knife in his breast. The Gentleman rises to his feet with a shriek of agony. As he falls backward into the sea, one of his clutching hands fastens itself in the neck of the Sailor's jersey. The Sailor tries to force the hand away, stumbles, loses

*his balance, and plunges headlong after him. There is a great splash. The waiting fins rush in. The water is lashed into foam. The Sailor's black head appears for a moment, his features distorted with terror, his lips torn with a howl of despair. Then he is drawn under.*

*The black stain on the water widens. The fins circle no longer. The raft floats in the midst of a vast silence. The sun glares down like a great angry eye of God. The errie heat waves float upward in the still air like the souls of the drowned. On the raft a diamond necklace lies glittering in the blazing sunshine.*

## CURTAIN





# **THE WEB**

## **A PLAY IN ONE ACT**

### ***CHARACTERS***

*Rose Thomas*

*Steve, a "Cadet"*

*Tim Moran, a Yeggman*

*A Policeman*

*Two Plain Clothes Men*



# THE WEB

## A PLAY IN ONE ACT

*Scene—A squalid bedroom on the top floor of a rooming house on the lower East Side, New York. The wall paper is dirty and torn in places showing the plaster beneath. There is an open window in back looking out on a fire escape on which a bottle of milk can be seen. On the right is a door leading to the hallway. On the left a wash-stand with a bowl and pitcher, and some meager articles of a woman's toilet-set scattered on it. Above the wash-stand a cracked mirror hangs from a nail in the wall. In the middle of the room stands a rickety table and a chair. In the left hand corner near the window is a bed in which a baby is lying asleep. A gas jet near the mirror furnishes the only light.*

*Rose Thomas, a dark-haired young woman looking thirty but really only twenty-two, is discovered sitting on the chair smoking a cheap Virginia cigarette. An empty beer bottle and a dirty glass stand on the table beside her. Her hat, a gaudy, cheap affair with a scraggy, imitation plume, is also on the table. Rose is dressed in the tawdry extreme of fashion. She has earrings in her ears, bracelets*

*on both wrists, and a quantity of rings—none of them genuine. Her face is that of a person in an advanced stage of consumption—deathly pale with hollows in under the eyes, which are wild and feverish. Her attitude is one of the deepest dejection. When she glances over at the bed, however, her expression grows tenderly maternal. From time to time she coughs—a harsh, hacking cough that shakes her whole body. After these spells she raises her handkerchief to her lips—then glances at it fearfully.*

*The time is in the early hours of a rainy summer night. The monotonous sound of the rain falling on the flags of the court below is heard.*

ROSE—(*Listening to the rain—throws the cigarette wearily on the table.*) “Gawd! What a night!” (*Laughing bitterly.*) “What a chance I got!” (*She has a sudden fit of coughing; then gets up and goes over to the bed and bending down gently kisses the sleeping child on the forehead. She turns away with a sob and murmur.*) “What a life! Poor kid!” (*She goes over to the mirror and makes up her eyes and cheeks. The effect is ghastly. Her blackened eyes look enormous and the dabs of rouge on each cheek serve to heighten her aspect of feverish illness. Just as she has completed her toilet and is putting on her hat in front of the mirror, the door is flung open and Steve lurches*

*in and bolts the door after him. He has very evidently been drinking. In appearance he is a typical "cadet," flashily dressed, rat-eyed, weak of mouth, undersized, and showing on his face the effects of drink and drugs.)*

ROSE—(*Hurriedly putting her hat down on the wash-stand—half frightened.*) "Hello, Steve."

STEVE—(*Looking her up and down with a sneer.*) "Yuh're a fine lookin' mess!" (*He walks over and sits down in the chair.*) "Yuh look like a dead one. Put on some paint and cheer up! Yuh give me the willies standin' there like a ghost."

ROSE—(*Rushes over to mirror and plasters on more rouge—then turns around.*) "Look, Steve! Ain't that better?"

STEVE—"Better? Naw, but it'll do." (*Seeing empty beer bottle.*) "Gimme a drink!"

ROSE—"Yuh know there ain't any. That's the bottle yuh brought up last night."

STEVE—(*With peevish anger.*) "Yuh lie! I'll bet yuh got some burried around here some place. Yuh're always holdin' out on me and yuh got to quit it, see?"

ROSE—"I never hold out on yuh and yuh know it. That's all the thanks I get." (*Angrily.*) "What'ud yuh do if I was like Bessie with your friend Jack? Then yuh might have some chance to kick. She's got enough salted to leave him any time she wants

to—and he knows it and sticks to her like glue. Yuh don't notice him runnin' after every doll he sees like some guys I know. He's afraid of losin' her—while *you* don't care."

STEVE—(*Flattered—in a conciliating tone.*) "Aw, shut up! Yuh make me sick with dat line of bull. Who said I was chasin' any dolls?" (*Then venomously.*) "I'm not so sure Jack is wise to Bessie holdin' out on him; but I'll tell him, and if he isn't wise to it, Bessie'll be in for a good beatin'."

ROSE—"Aw, don't do that! What 'cha got against her? She ain't done nothin' to you, has she?"

STEVE—"Naw; but she oughta be learned a lesson dat's all. She oughta be on the level with him. Us guys has got to stand together. What'ud we do if all youse dolls got holdin' out on the side?"

ROSE—(*Dejectedly.*) "Don't ask me. I dunno. It's a bum game all round." (*She has a fit of horrible coughing.*)

STEVE—(*His nerves shattered.*) "Dammit! Stop that barkin'. It goes right trou me. Git some medicine for it, why don't yuh?"

ROSE—(*Wiping her lips with her handkerchief.*) "I did but it ain't no good."

STEVE—"Then git somethin' else. I told yuh months ago to go and see a doctor. Did yuh?"

ROSE—(*Nervously, after a pause.*) "No."

STEVE—"Well den, yuh can't blame me. It's up to you."

ROSE—(*Speaking eagerly and beseechingly, almost in tears.*) "Listen, Steve! Let me stay in to-night and go to the Doc's. I'm sick." (*Pointing to breast.*) "I got pains here and it seems as if I was on fire inside. Sometimes I git dizzy and everythin' goes round and round. Anyway it's rainin' and my shoes are full of holes. There won't be no one out to-night, and even if there was they're all afraid of me on account of this cough. Gimme a couple of dollars and let me go to the Doc's and git some medicine. Please, Steve, for Gawd's sake! I'll make it up to yuh when I'm well. I'll be makin' lots of coin then and yuh kin have it all." (*Goes off into a paroxysm of coughing.*) "I'm so sick!"

STEVE—(*In indignant amazement.*) "A couple of beans! What'd'yuh think I am—the mint?"

ROSE—"But yuh had lots of coin this mornin'. Didn't I give yuh all I had?"

STEVE—(*Sullenly.*) "Well, I ain't got it now, see? I got into a game at Tony's place and they cleaned me. I ain't got a nick." (*With sudden anger.*) "And I wouldn't give it to yuh if I had it. D'yuh think I'm a simp to be gittin' yuh protection and keepin' the bulls from runnin' yuh in when all yuh do is to stick at home and play dead?"



If yuh want any coin git out and make it. That's all I got to say."

ROSE—(*Furiously.*) "So that's all yuh got to say, is it? Well, I'll hand yuh a tip right here. I'm gittin' sick of givin' yuh my roll and gittin' nothin' but abuse in retoin. Yuh're half drunk now. And yuh been hittin' the pipe too; I kin tell by the way your eyes look. D'yuh think I'm goin' to stand for a guy that's always full of booze and hop? Not so yuh could notice it! There's too many others I kin get."

STEVE—(*His eyes narrow and his voice becomes loud and threatening.*) "Can that chatter, d'yuh hear me? If yuh ever t'row me down—look out! I'll get yuh!"

ROSE—(*In a frenzy.*) "Get me? Wha'd I care? D'yuh think I'm so stuck on this life I wanta go on livin'? Kill me! Wha'd I care?"

STEVE—(*Jumps up from the table and raises his hand as if to strike her. He shouts:*) "Fur Chris' sake, shut up!" (*The baby, awakened by the loud voices, commences to cry.*)

ROSE—(*Her anger gone in a flash.*) "Sssshhh! There, we woke her up. Keep still, Steve. I'll go out, yuh needn't worry. Jest don't make so much noise, that's all." (*She goes over to the bed and cuddles the child. It soon falls asleep again. She begins to cough and rising to her feet walks away*

*from the bed keeping her face turned away from the baby.)*

STEVE—(*Who has been watching her with a malignant sneer.*) "Yuh'll have to take that kid out of the bed. I gotta git some sleep."

ROSE—"But, Steve, where'll I put her? There's no place else."

STEVE—"On the floor—any place. Wha'd I care where yuh put it?"

ROSE—(*Supplicatingly.*) Aw please, Steve! Be a good guy! She won't bother yuh none. She's fast asleep. Yuh got three-quarters of the bed to lie on. Let her stay there."

STEVE—"Nix! Yuh heard what I said, didn't yuh? Git busy, then. Git her out of there."

ROSE—(*With cold fury.*) "I won't do it."

STEVE—"Yuh won't, eh? Den I will." (*He makes a move toward the bed.*)

ROSE—(*Standing between him and the bed in a resolute attitude, speaks slowly and threateningly.*) "I've stood about enough from you. Don't yuh dare touch her or I'll—"

STEVE—(*Blusteringly, a bit shaken in his coward soul however.*) "What'll yuh do? Don't try and bluff me. And now we're talkin' about it I wanta tell yuh that kid has got to go. I've stood fur it as long as I kin with its ballin' and whinin'. Yuh gotta git rid of it, that's all. Give it to some orphan

asylum. They'll take good care of it. I know what I'm talkin' about cause I was brung up in one myself." (*With a sneer.*) "What'd you want with a kid?" (*Rose winces.*) "A fine mother you are and dis is a swell dump to bring up a family in."

ROSE—"Please, Steve for the love of Gawd lemme keep her! She's all I got to live for. If yuh take her away I'll die. I'll kill myself."

STEVE—(*Contemptuously.*) "Dat's what they all say. But she's got to go. All yuh do now is fuss over dat kid, comin' home every ten minutes to see if it's hungry or somethin'! Dat's why we're broke all the time. I've stood fur it long enough."

ROSE—(*On her knees—weeping.*) "Please, Steve, for Gawd's sake lemme keep her!"

STEVE—(*Coldly.*) "Stop dat blubberin'. It won't do no good. I give yuh a week. If yuh don't git dat brat outa here in a week den I will."

ROSE—"Wha'd'yuh mean? What'll yuh do?"

STEVE—"I'll have yuh pinched and sent to the Island. The kid'll be took away from yuh then."

ROSE—(*In anguish.*) "Yuh're jest tryin' to scare me, ain't yuh, Steve? They wouldn't do that, would they?"

STEVE—"Yuh'll soon know whether dey would or not."

ROSE—"But yuh wouldn't have me pinched, would yuh, Steve? Yuh wouldn't do me dirt like

that?"

STEVE—"I wouldn't, wouldn't I? Yuh jest wait and see!"

ROSE—"Aw, Steve, I always been good to you."

STEVE—"Git dat kid outa here or I'll put yuh in in the cooler as sure as hell!"

ROSE—(*Maddened, rushing at him with outstretched hands.*) "Yuh dirty dog!" (*There is a struggle during which the table is overturned. Finally Steve frees himself and hits her in the face with his fist, knocking her down. At the same instant the door from the hallway is forced open and Tim Moran pushes his way in. He is short and thick set, with a bullet head, close-cropped black hair, a bull neck, and small blue eyes set close together. Although distinctly a criminal type his face is in part redeemed by its look of manliness. He is dressed in dark ill-fitting clothes, and has an automatic revolver in his hand which he keeps pointed at Steve.*)

TIM—(*Pointing to the door, speaks to Steve with cold contempt.*) "Git outa here, yuh lousy skunk, and stay out!" (*As Steve's hand goes to his hip.*) "Take yer hand away from that gat or I'll fill yuh full of holes." (*Steve is cowed and obeys.*) "Now git out and don't come back. If yuh bother this goil again I'll fix yuh and fix yuh right. D'yuh get me?"

STEVE—(*Snarling, and slinking toward door.*)  
“Yuh think yuh’re some smart, dontcha, buttin’ in dis way on a guy? It ain’t none of your business. She’s my goil.”

TIM—“D’yuh think I’m goin’ to stand by and let yuh beat her up jest cause she wants to keep her kid? D’yuh think I’m as low as you are, yuh dirty mut? Git outa here before I croak yuh.”

STEVE—(*Standing in the doorway and looking back.*) “Yuh got the drop on me now; but I’ll get yuh, yuh wait and see!” (*To Rose.*) “And you too.” (*He goes out and can be heard descending the stairs. Rose hurries over to the door and tries to lock it, but the lock is shattered, so she puts the chair against it to keep it shut. She then goes over to the baby, who has been whimpering unnoticed during the quarrel, and soothes her to sleep again. Tim, looking embarrassed, puts the revolver back in his pocket and picking up the table sets it to rights again and sits on the edge of it. Rose looks up at him from the bed, half bewildered at seeing him still there. Then she breaks into convulsive sobbing.*)

TIM—(*Making a clumsy attempt at consolation.*)  
“There, there, Kid, cut the cryin’. He won’t bother yuh no more. I know his kind. He’s got a streak of yellow a yard wide, and beatin’ up women is all he’s game for. But he won’t hurt you no more—

not if I know it."

ROSE—"Yuh don't know him. When he's full of booze and hop he's liable to do anythin'. I don't care what he does to me. I might as well be dead anyway. But there's the kid. I got to look after her. And" (*Looking at him gratefully.*) "I don't want you to git in no mix-ups on account of me. I ain't worth it."

TIM—(*Quickly.*) "Nix on that stuff about your not bein' worth it!"

ROSE—(*Smiling.*) "Thanks. And I'm mighty glad yuh came in when yuh did. Gawd knows what he'd'a done to the kid and me not able to stop him."

TIM—"Don't yuh worry about my gettin' into no mix-ups. I c'n take care of myself."

ROSE—"How did yuh happen to blow in when yuh did? There usually ain't no one around in this dump at this time of the night."

TIM—"I got the room next to yuh. I heard every word the both of yuh said—tonight and every other night since I come here a week ago. I know the way he's treated yuh. I'd'a butted in sooner only I didn't want to mix in other peoples business. But tonight when he started in about the kid there I couldn't stand fur it no longer. I was jest wantin' to hand him a call and I let him have it. Why d'yuh stand fur him anyway? Why don't yuh take

the kid and beat it away from him?"

ROSE—(*Despondently.*) "It's easy to say: 'Why don't I beat it?' I can't."

TIM—"Wha'd'yuh mean? Why can't yuh?"

ROSE—"I never have enough coin to make a good break and git out of town. He takes it all away from me. And if I went to some other part of this burg he'd find me and kill me. Even if he didn't kill me he'd have me pinched and where'd the kid be then?" (*Grimly.*) "Oh, he's got me where he wants me all right, all right."

TIM—"I don't get yuh? How could he have yuh pinched if yuh ain't done nothin'?"

ROSE—"Oh, he's got a drag somewhere. He squares it with the cops so they don't hold me up for walkin' the streets. Yuh ought to be wise enough to know all of his kind stand in. If he tipped them off to do it they'd pinch me before I'd gone a block. Then it'd be the Island fur mine."

TIM—"Then why don't yuh cut this life and be on the level? Why don't yuh git a job some place? He couldn't touch yuh then."

ROSE—(*Scornfully.*) "Oh, couldn't he? D'yuh suppose they'd keep me any place if they knew what I was? And d'yuh suppose he wouldn't tell them or have some one else tell them? Yuh don't know the game I'm up against." (*Bitterly.*) "I've tried that job thing. I've looked fur decent work and

I've starved at it. A year after I first hit this town I quit and tried to be on the level. I got a job at housework—workin' twelve hours a day for twenty-five dollars a month. And I worked like a dog, too, and never left the house I was so scared of seein' some one who knew me. But what was the use? One night they have a guy to dinner who's seen me some place when I was on the town. He tells the lady—his duty he said it was—and she fires me right off the reel. I tried the same thing a lot of times. But there was always some one who'd drag me back. And then I quit tryin'. There didn't seem to be no use. They—all the good people—they got me where I am and they're goin' to keep me there. Reform? Take it from me it can't be done. They won't let yuh do it, and that's Gawd's truth."

TIM—"Give it another trial any way. Yuh never know your luck. Yuh might be able to stick this time."

ROSE—(*Wearily.*) "Talk is cheap. Yuh don't know what yuh're talkin' about. What job c'n I git? What am I fit fur? Housework is the only thing I know about and I don't know much about that. Where else could I make enough to live on? That's the trouble with all us girls. Most all of us ud like to come back but we jest can't and that's all there's to it. We can't work out of this life



because we don't know how to work. We was never taught how." (*She shakes with a horrible fit of coughing, wipes her lips, and smiles pitifully.*) "Who d'yuh think would take a chance on hiring me the way I look and with this cough? Besides, there's the kid." (*Sarcastically.*) "Yuh may not know it but people ain't strong for hirin' girls with babies—especially when the girls ain't married."

TIM—"But yuh could send the kid away some place."

ROSE—(*Fiercely.*) "No. She's all I got. I won't give her up." (*She coughs again.*)

TIM—(*Kindly.*) "That's a bad cough yuh got, Kid. I heard yuh tellin' him tonight yuh hadn't seen a doctor." (*Putting hand in his pocket.*) "I'll stake yuh and yuh c'n run around and see one now."

ROSE—"Thanks jest the same but it ain't no use. I lied to Steve. I went to a doc about a month ago. He told me I had the 'con' and had it bad." (*With grim humor.*) "He said the only hope fur me was to git out in the country, sleep in the open air, and eat a lot of good food. He might jest as well 'uv told me to go to Heaven and I told him so. Then he said I could go out to some dump where yuh don't have to pay nothin', but he said I'd have to leave the kid behind. I told him I'd rather die than do that, and he said I'd have to be careful or the kid 'ud catch it from me. And I have been care-

ful." (*She sobs.*) "I don't even kiss her on the mouth no more."

TIM—"Yuh sure are up against it, Kid." (*He appears deeply moved.*) "Gee, I thought I was in bad, but yuh got me skinned to death."

ROSE—(*Interested.*) "You in bad? Yuh don't look it."

TIM—"Listen! Yuh talk about tryin' to be good and not bein' able to—Well, I been up against the same thing. When I was a kid I was sent to the Reform school fur stealin'; and it wasn't my fault. I was mixed up with a gang older than me and wasn't wise to what I was doin'. They made me the goat; and in the Reform school they made a crook outa me. When I come out I tried to be straight and hold down a job, but as soon as any one got wise I'd been in a Reform school they caned me same as they did you. Then I stole again—to keep from starvin.' They got me and this time I went to the coop fur five years. Then I give up. I seen it was no use. When I got out again I got in with a gang of yeggmen and learned how to be a yegg—and I've been one ever since. I've spent most of my life in jail but I'm free now."

ROSE—"What are yuh goin' to do?"

TIM—(*Fiercely.*) "What am I goin' to do? They made a yegg outa me! Let 'em look out!"

ROSE—"When did yuh get out?"

TIM—(*Suspiciously.*) "What's it to you?" (*Then suddenly.*) "Nix, I didn't mean that. Yuh're a good kid and maybe yuh c'n help me."

ROSE—"I'd sure like to."

TIM—"Then listen!" (*Looking at her fixedly.*) "Yuh swear yuh won't squeal on me?"

ROSE—"I won't, so help me Gawd!"

TIM—"Well, I'm Tim Moran. I jest broke out two weeks ago."

ROSE—(*Staring at him with a fascinated wonder.*) "You! Tim Moran! The guy that robbed that bank a week ago! The guy they're all lookin' fur!"

TIM—"Sssshhh! Yuh never c'n tell who's got an ear glued to the wall in a dump like this."

ROSE—(*Lowering her voice.*) "I read about yuh in the papers." (*She looks at him as if she were half afraid.*)

TIM—"Yuh're not afraid of me, are yuh? I ain't the kind of crook Steve is, yuh know."

ROSE—(*Calmly.*) "No, I ain't afraid of yuh, Tim; but I'm afraid they may find yuh here and take yuh away again." (*Anxiously.*) "D'yuh think Steve knew yuh? He'd squeal sure if he did—to git the reward."

TIM—"No, I could tell by his eyes he didn't know me."

ROSE—"How long have yuh been here?"

TIM—"A week—ever since I cracked that safe. I wanted to give the noise time to blow over. I ain't left that room except when I had to git a bite to eat, and then I got enough fur a couple of days. But when I come in tonight I seen a guy on the corner give me a long look. He looked bad to me and I wanta git out of here before they git wise."

ROSE—"Yuh think he was a cop?"

TIM—"Yes, I got a hunch. He looked bad to me."

ROSE—(*Wonderingly.*) "And yuh come in here tonight knowin' he was liable to spot yuh! Yuh took that chance fur me when yuh didn't even know me!" (*Impulsively going over to him and taking his hand which he tries to hold back.*) "Gee, yuh're a regular guy, all right."

TIM—(*In great confusion.*) "Aw, that's nothin'. Any one would'a done it."

ROSE—"No one would'a done it in your place." (*A slight noise is heard from the hallway. Rose looks around startled and speaks hurriedly almost in a whisper.*) "Supposin' that guy was a cop? Supposin' he had a hunch who you was? How're yuh goin' to make a getaway? Can't I help yuh outa this? Can't I do somethin' fur yuh?"

TIM—(*Points to window.*) "That's a fire escape, ain't it?"

ROSE—"Yes."

TIM—"Where does it lead to?"

ROSE—"Down to the yard and up to the roof."

TIM—"To hell with the yard. I'll try the roofs if it comes to a showdown. I'll stick in here with you so's if they come I c'n make a quick getaway. Yuh tell 'em yuh dont know anything about me, see? Give 'em a bum steer if you kin. Try and hold 'em so's I c'n get a good start."

ROSE—(*Resolutely.*) "I'll hold 'em as long as I c'n, don't worry. I'll tell 'em I seen yuh goin' down stairs an hour ago."

TIM—"Good Kid!" (*They are standing in the middle of the room with their backs to the window. Steve's face appears peering around the edge of the window-frame. He is crouched on the fire-escape outside. His eyes glare with hatred as he watches the two persons in the room. Rose starts to cough, is frightened by the noise she makes, and holds her handkerchief over her mouth to stifle the sound.*)

TIM—"Sssshhh! Poor Kid!" (*He turns to her and speaks rapidly in low tones.*) "Here, Kid." (*He takes a large roll of money out of his pocket and forces it into her hand—as she starts to remonstrate.*) "Shut up! I ain't got time to listen to your beefin'. Take it. It ain't much but it's all I got with me. I don't need it. There's plenty more waitin' fur me outside. This'll be enough to git you and the kid out of town away from that dirty

coward." (*Steve's face is convulsed with fury.*)  
"Go some place out in the mountains and git rid of that cough."

ROSE—(*Sobbing.*) "I can't take it. Yuh been too good to me already. Yuh don't know how rotten I am."

TIM—(*Suddenly taking her in his arms and kissing her roughly.*) "That's how rotten I think yuh are. Yuh're the whitest kid I've ever met, see?" (*They look into each other's eyes. All the hardness of Rose's expression has vanished. Her face is soft, transfigured by a new emotion. Steve moves his hand into the room. He holds a revolver which he tries to aim at Tim but he is afraid to fire.*)

ROSE—(*Throwing her arms around his neck.*)  
"Tim, Tim, yuh been too good to me."

TIM—(*Kissing her again.*) "Lemme know where yuh are and when it's safe I'll come to yuh." (*Releases her and takes a small folded paper from pocket.*) "This'll find me." (*She takes it, her eyes full of happy tears.*) "Maybe after a time we c'n start over again—together!" (*A sound like the creaking of a floor board is heard from the hallway.*) "What's that?" (*They both stand looking fixedly at the door. Steve noiselessly disappears from the window.*) "Gee, Kid, I got a feelin' in my bones they're after me. It's only a hunch but it's never gone wrong yet." (*He pulls a cap out*

*of his pocket and puts it on.)* "I'm goin' to blow."

ROSE—(*Goes over to the door and listens.*)  
"Sounds as if somebody was sneakin' up the stairs."  
(*She tiptoes quickly over to him and kisses him.*)  
"Go, go while yuh got a chance. Don't let 'em  
git yuh! I love yuh, Tim."

TIM—"Good-bye, Kid. I'll come as soon as I  
c'n." (*He kisses her again and goes quickly to  
the window. Steve stretches his hand around the  
side of the window and fires, the muzzle of the gun  
almost on Tim's chest. There is a loud report and  
a little smoke. Tim staggers back and falls on the  
floor. Steve throws the gun into the room, then  
quietly pulls down the window and disappears. The  
child in the bed wakes up and cries feebly.*)

ROSE—(*Rushes to Tim and kneels beside him,  
holding his head on her breast.*) "Tim! Tim!  
Speak to me, Tim!" (*She kisses him frantically.*)

TIM—(*His eyes glazing.*) "Good Kid—moun-  
tains—git rid of that cough."  
(*He dies.*)

ROSE—(*Letting his head fall back on the floor  
sinks to a sitting position beside him. The money  
is still clutched in her right hand. She stares straight  
before her and repeats in tones of horrible monoton-  
y.*) "Dead. Oh Gawd, Gawd, Gawd!" (*The  
sound of people running up the stairs in the hall  
is heard. A voice shouts: "Must be in here." The*

*door is pushed open and three men enter. One is a policeman in uniform and the other two are evidently plain clothes men. The landlady and several roomers stand in the doorway looking in with frightened faces.)*

THE POLICEMAN—(*Goes to Rose and, taking her arm, hauls her to her feet.*) “Come, get up outa that!” (*The two plain clothes men take one look at the dead man and both exclaim together:*) “Tim Moran!”

FIRST PLAIN CLOTHES MAN—“I told yuh it was him I seen comin’ in here tonight. I never forget a face.”

SECOND PLAIN CLOTHES MAN—(*Picking revolver off the floor and examining it.*) “I didn’t think he’d be fool enough to stick around here.” (*Turning suddenly to Rose.*) “What did yuh croak him for?” (*Ironically.*) “A little love spat, eh?” (*Sees the roll of money in her hand and grabs her quickly by the wrist.*) “Pipe the roll! Little sister here attends to business, all right. Gave him a frisk before we had a chance to get here.” (*To Rose in loud, rough tones.*) “Why did yuh kill him? It was for this coin, wasn’t it?” (*During the detective’s remarks Rose gradually realizes the position she is in. Her expression becomes one of amazed pain as she sees they think she is guilty of the murder. She speaks brokenly, trying to hold*



*herself in control.*)

ROSE—"Honest to Gawd, I didn't do it. He gave me this money. Some one shot him from the window." (*Then quite simply as if that explained it all away.*) "Why, I loved him."

SECOND PLAIN CLOTHES MAN—"Stop that noise! Wha'd'yuh take us for—boobs? The window ain't even open and the glass ain't broken. He gave yuh the money, eh? And then shot himself, I suppose? Aw say, Kid, wha'd'yuh take us for?"

ROSE—(*Losing all control, frenziedly breaks from the Policeman's grasp and throws herself beside body.*) "Tim! Tim! For the love of Gawd speak to them. Tell 'em I didn't do it, Tim! Tell 'em yuh gave that money to me. Yuh know what yuh said—'Take the kid into the mountains and git rid of that cough.' Tell 'em yuh said that, Tim! Speak to 'em! Tell 'em I loved yuh, Tim—that I wanted to help yuh git away. Tell 'em yuh kissed me. They think I shot yuh. They don't know I loved yuh. For the love of Gawd speak to 'em." (*Weeping and sobbing bitterly.*) "Oh Gawd, why don't yuh speak, why don't yuh speak?"

FIRST PLAIN CLOTHES MAN—(*Sneeringly.*) "That's good stuff but it won't get yuh anything." (*Turning to his two companions.*) "Looks to me as if this doll was full of coke or something. You two better take her to the station and make a report.

I'll stay here and keep cases on the room. I'm sick of listenin' to that sob stuff."

ROSE—(*The policeman taps her on the shoulder and she rises to her feet with a spring, wildly protesting.*) "But I tell yuh I didn't do it! It was from the window. Can't yuh believe me? I swear I—" (*She stops appalled by the unbelieving sneers of the policemen, by the white faces in the doorway gazing at her with fascinated horror. She reads her own guilt in every eye. She realizes the futility of all protest, the maddening hopelessness of it all. The child is still crying. She notices it for the first time and goes over to the bed to soothe it. The policeman keeps a tight hold of one of her arms. She speaks words of tenderness to the child in dull, mechanical tones. It stops crying. All are looking at her in silence with a trace of compassionate pity on their faces. Rose seems in a trance. Her eyes are like the eyes of a blind woman. She seems to be aware of something in the room which none of the others can see—perhaps the personification of the ironic life force that has crushed her.*)

FIRST PLAIN CLOTHES MAN—"Your kid?"

ROSE—(*To the unseen presence in the room.*) "Yes. I suppose yuh'll take her too?"

FIRST PLAIN CLOTHES MAN—(*Misunderstanding her, good naturedly.*) "I'll take care of her for the time bein'."

ROSE—(*To the air.*) "That's right. Make a good job of me." (*Suddenly she stretches both arms above her head and cries bitterly, mournfully, out of the depths of her desolation:*) "Gawd! Gawd! Why d'yuh hate me so?"

THE POLICEMAN—(*Shocked.*) "Here, here, no rough talk like that. Come along now!" (*Rose leans against him weakly and he supports her to the door where the group of horrified lodgers silently make way for them. The Second Plain Clothes Man follows them. A moment later Rose's hollow cough echoes in the dark hallway. The child wakes up and cries fitfully. The First Plain Clothes Man goes over to the bed and cuddles her on his lap with elephantine playfulness.*)

THE CHILD—(*Feebly.*) "Maamaaaa!"

THE FIRST PLAIN CLOTHES MAN—"Mama's gone. I'm your Mama now."

CURTAIN

## WARNINGS

### A PLAY IN ONE ACT

SCENE I—The dining-room of James Knapp's flat in the Bronx, New York City.

SCENE II—Section of the boat deck of the S. S. "Empress" showing the wireless room. (*About two months later.*)

### CHARACTERS

*James Knapp—Wireless operator of the S. S. "Empress."*

*Mary Knapp—His wife.*

*Charles—aged 15*

*Dolly— " 14*

*Lizzie— " 11*

*Sue— " 8*

*A baby— " 1 yr.*

*Their children.*

*Capt. Hardwick of the "Empress."*

*Mason—First Officer of the "Empress."*

*Dick Whitney—Wireless operator of the S. S.*

*"Duchess" of the same line.*



## WARNINGS

*Scene I—The dining room of James Knapp's flat in the Bronx, N. Y. City. To the left is a door opening into the main hall, farther back a chair, and then a heavy green curtain which screens off an alcove probably used as a bedroom. To the right a doorway leading into the kitchen, another chair, and a window, with some plants in pots on the sill, which opens on a court. Hanging in front of the window is a gilt cage in which a canary chirps sleepily. The walls of the room are papered an impossible green and the floor is covered with a worn carpet of nearly the same color. Several gaudy Sunday-supplement pictures in cheap gilt frames are hung at spaced intervals around the walls. The dining table with its flowered cover is pushed back against the middle wall to allow of more space for free passage between the kitchen and the front part of the flat. On the wall above the table is a mantle piece on the middle of which a black marble clock ticks mournfully. The clock is flanked on both sides by a formidable display of family photographs. Above the mantle hangs a "Home Sweet Home" motto in a black frame. A lamp of the Welsbach*

*type, fixed on the chandelier which hangs from the middle of the ceiling, floods the small room with bright light. It is about half-past eight of an October evening. The time is the present.*

*Mrs. Knapp is discovered sitting at the end of the table near the kitchen. She is a pale, thin, peevish-looking woman of about forty, made prematurely old by the thousand worries of a penny-pinching existence. Her originally fine constitution has been broken down by the bearing of many children in conditions under which every new arrival meant a new mouth crying for its share of the already inadequate supply of life's necessities. Her brown hair, thickly streaked with gray, is drawn back tightly over her ears into a knot at the back of her head. Her thin-lipped mouth droops sorrowfully at the corners, and her faded blue eyes have an expression of fretful weariness. She wears a soiled grey wrapper and black carpet slippers. When she speaks, her voice is plaintively querulous and without authority.*

*Two of the children, Lizzie and Sue, are seated on her left facing the family photos. They are both bent over the table with curly blond heads close together. Under Lizzie's guidance Sue is attempting to write something on the pad before her. Both are dressed in clean looking dark clothes with black shoes and stockings.*

LIZZIE—"That's not the way to make a 'g.' Give

me the pencil and I'll show you." (*She tries to take the pencil away from Sue.*)

SUE—(*Resisting and commencing to cry.*) "I don' wanta give you the pencil. Mama-a! Make her stop!"

MRS. KNAPP—(*Wearily.*) "For goodness' sake stop that racket, Sue! Give her the pencil, Lizzie! You ought to be ashamed to fight with your little sister—and you so much older than her. I declare a body can't have a moment's peace in this house with you children all the time wranglin' and fightin'."

SUE—(*Bawling louder than ever.*) "Mama-a! She won't give it to me!"

MRS. KNAPP—(*With an attempt at firmness.*) "Lizzie! Did you hear what I said? Give her that pencil this instant!"

LIZZIE—(*Not impressed.*) "I wanta show her how to make a 'g' and she won't let me. Make her stop, Mama!"

SUE—(*Screaming.*) "I did make a 'g!' I did make a 'g!' "

LIZZIE—"Ooo! Listen to her tellin' lies, Mama. She didn't make a 'g' at all. She don't know how."

SUE—"I do! Gimme that pencil."

LIZZIE—"You don't. I won't give it to you."

MRS. KNAPP—(*Aggravated into action gets quickly from her chair and gives Lizzie a ringing*



*box on the ear.*) "There, you naughty child! That will teach you to do what I say. Give me that pencil." (*She snatches it from Lizzie's hand and gives it to Sue.*) "There's the pencil! For goodness sake hush up your cryin'!" (*Sue subsides into sobbing but Lizzie puts her hand over the smarting ear and starts to howl with all her might.*)

SUE—(*Whimpering again as she discovers the point of the pencil has been broken off.*) "Look Mama! She broke the pencil!"

MRS. KNAPP—(*Distracted.*) "Be still and I'll sharpen it for you." (*Turning to Lizzie and taking her on her lap.*) "There! There! Stop cryin'! Mama didn't mean to hurt you." (*Lizzie only cries the harder.*) "Stop crying and I'll give you a piece of candy." (*Lizzie's anguish vanishes in a flash.*) "Kiss mama now and promise not to be naughty any more!"

LIZZIE—(*Kissing her obediently.*) "I promise. Where's the candy Mama?"

SUE—(*No longer interested in pencils.*) "I want a piece of candy too."

MRS. KNAPP—(*Goes to the kitchen and returns with two sticky chunks of molasses candy.*) "Here Lizzie! Here Sue!" (*Sue manages with some effort to cram the candy into her small mouth.*) "Neither one of you said 'thank you.'" (*Lizzie dutifully numbles "thanks" but Sue is beyond*

speech.) "I declare I don't know what I'll do with you children. You never seem to learn manners. It's just as if you were brought up on the streets—the way you act." (*The clock strikes 8.30 and Mrs. Knapp looks at it gratefully.*) "There, children. It's half-past eight and you must both go to bed right away. Goodness knows I have a hard enough time gettin' you up for school in the morning."

SUE—(*Having eaten enough of her candy to allow of her voicing a protest.*) "I don' wanta go to bed."

LIZZIE—(*Sulking.*) "You said you'd let us stay up to see Papa."

SUE—"I wanta see Papa."

MRS. KNAPP—"That will do. I won't listen to any more of your talk. You've seen your father all afternoon. That's only an excuse to stay up late. He went to the doctor's and goodness knows when he'll be back. I promised to let you sit up till half-past eight and it's that now. Come now! Kiss me like two good little girls and go straight to bed." (*The two good little girls perform their kissing with an ill grace and depart slowly for bed through the alcove.*)

MRS. KNAPP—"Mind you don't wake the baby with your carryings-on or I'll tell your father to spank you good." (*She has an afterthought.*) "And

don't forget your prayers!" (*She sinks back with a deep sigh of relief and taking up an evening paper from the table, commences to read. She has hardly settled back comfortably when shouts and the noise of running steps are heard from the stairs in the hallway. Then a rattling tattoo of knocks shakes the door and a girl's voice laughingly shouts thro' the key hole, 'Open up Ma!'*")

MRS. KNAPP—(*Going quickly to the door and unlocking it.*) "Hush up your noise for goodness sakes! Do you want to wake up the baby? I never saw such children. You haven't any feelin' for your mother at all."

(*Charles and Dolly push hurriedly into the room. Mrs. Knapp locks the door again and resumes her seat at the table. Charles is a gawky, skinny youth of fifteen who has outgrown his clothes, and whose arms and legs seem to have outgrown him. His features are large and irregular; his eyes small and watery-blue in color. When he takes off his cap a mop of sandy hair falls over his forehead. He is dressed in a shabby grey Norfolk suit.*

*Although extremely thin, Dolly is rather pretty with her dark eyes, and brown curls hanging over her shoulders. She is dressed neatly in a dark blue frock with black shoes and stockings and a black felt hat. Her ordinarily sallow city complexion*

*is flushed from the run upstairs.)*

DOLLY—(*Rushing over and kissing her mother—mischievously.*) “What do you think I saw, Ma?”

CHARLIE—(*In a loud voice—almost a shout.*)  
What do you think I saw, Mom?”

MRS. KNAPP—“For heaven’s sake, Charlie, speak lower. Do you want the people in the next block to hear you? If you wake up the baby I shall certainly tell your father on you. Take off your hat when you’re in the house! Whatever is the matter with you? Can’t you remember anything? I’m really ashamed of you—the way you act.”

CHARLIE—(*Taking off his cap.*) “Aw, what’s the matter, Mom? Gee, you’re got an awful grouch on tonight.”

MRS. KNAPP—“Never mind talkin’ back to your mother, young man. Why shouldn’t I be cranky with you bellowin’ around here like a young bull? I just got the baby to sleep and if you wake her up with your noise heaven knows when I’ll get any peace again.”

DOLLY—(*Interrupting her—with a laughing glance at Charlie.*) “You can’t guess what I saw, Ma.”

CHARLIE—(*Sheepishly.*) “Aw, all right for you. Go ahead and tell her if you wanta. I don’t care. I’ll tell her what I saw too.”

DOLLY—"You didn't see anything."

CHARLIE—"I did too."

DOLLY—"You didn't."

MRS. KNAPP—"For goodness sake stop your quarrelin'! First it's Lizzie and Sue and then it's you two. I never get time to even read a paper. What was it you saw, Dolly? Tell me if you're going to."

DOLLY—"I saw Charlie and that red-headed Harris girl in the corner drug store. He was buying her ice cream soda with that quarter Pop gave him."

CHARLIE—"I was no such thing."

DOLLY—"Oh, what a lie! You know you were."

MRS. KNAPP—"You ought to be ashamed of yourself, you big gump, you, goin' round with girls at your age and spendin' money on them. I'll tell your father how you spend the money he gives you and it'll be a long time before you get another cent."

CHARLIE—(*Sullenly.*) "Aw you needn't think I'm the only one." (*Pointing to Dolly.*) "I saw her down in the hallway with that Dutch kid whose father runs the saloon in the next block. It was dark down there too. I could hardly see them. And he's cross-eyed!"

DOLLY—"He is not."

CHARLIE—"Aw g'wan, of course he is. He can't

see straight or he'd never look at you."

DOLLY—"He's better than you are."

CHARLIE—(*Losing control of his voice and shouting again.*) "I'll hand him a punch in the eye the first time I see him. That's what I'll do to him, the Dutch boob. And I'll slap you in the nose too if you get too fresh." (*Dolly starts to cry.*)

MRS. KNAPP—(*Rising up swiftly and giving him a crack over the ear with her open hand.*) "That'll teach you, young man! Don't you dare to lay a hand on your sister or your father will whip you good."

CHARLIE—(*Backing away with his hand on his ear—in a whimper.*) "Aw, what are you always pickin' on me for? Why don't you say something to her?"

MRS. KNAPP—(*Turning to the still tearful Dolly.*) "And you, Miss! Don't you let me hear of you bein' in any dark hallways with young men again or I'll take you over my knee, so I will. The idea of such a thing! I can't understand you at all. I never was allowed out alone with anyone,—not even with your father, before I was engaged to be married to him. I don't know what's come over you young folks nowadays."

DOLLY—"It—wasn't—dark."

MRS. KNAPP—"It makes no difference. You heard what I said. Don't let it happen again."

*(Dolly wipes her eyes and makes a face at Charlie.)*

CHARLIE—*(His tones loud with triumph.)* "It was awful dark. She's liein' to you, Mom."

MRS. KNAPP—"Hold your tongue! I've heard enough from you. And don't yell at the top of your voice. You don't have to shout. I'm not deaf."

CHARLIE—*(Lower.)* "All right, Mom. But I've got into the habit of talking loud since Pop's been home. He don't seem to hear me when I talk low."

DOLLY—"That's right, Ma. I was talking to him this morning and when I got through he didn't know half that I'd told him."

MRS. KNAPP—"Your father has a bad cold and his head is all stopped up. *He* says he hasn't got a cold but I know better. I've been that way myself. But he won't believe me. So he's gone to pay five dollars to an ear specialist when all he needs is a dose of quinine—says a wireless operator can't afford to take chances. I told him a wireless operator couldn't afford to pay five dollars for nothin'—specially when he's got a wife and five children." *(Peevishly.)* "I don't know what's come over your father. He don't seem like the same man since this last trip on the 'Empress.' I think it must be that South American climate that's affectin' him."

DOLLY—"He's awful cross since he's been home this time. He yells at Charlie and me for nothing."

MRS. KNAPP—"He'd be all right if he could get another job. But he's afraid if he gives up this one he won't be able to get another. Your father ain't as young as he used to be and they all want young men now. He's got to keep on workin' or we'd never be able to even pay the rent. Goodness knows his salary is small enough. If it wasn't for your brother Jim sendin' us a few dollars every month, and Charlie earnin' five a week, and me washin', we'd never be able to get along even *with* your father's salary. But heaven knows what we'd do without it. We'd be put out in the streets."

CHARLIE—"Is that where Pop's gone tonight—to the doctor's?"

MRS. KNAPP—"Yes, and I don't know what can be keepin' him so long. He left after supper right after you did. You'd think he'd spend his last night at home when we won't see him again for three months."

CHARLIE—"Shall I go out and see if I can see him?"

MRS. KNAPP—"Don't go makin' excuses to get out on the street. You better go to bed if you wanta be up on time in the morning—you too, Dolly."

DOLLY—"I still got some of my lessons to fin-



ish." (*There is a sound from the hallway of someone coming up the stairs with slow, heavy steps.*)

MRS. KNAPP—"Here your father comes now! Get into the parlor, Dolly, if you wanta do your lessons. Don't let him see you up so late. Keep the light shaded so you won't wake up the baby." (*The steps stop before the door and a knock is heard.*) "Charlie, go open that door. My feet are worn out from standin' up all day." (*Charlie opens the door and James Knapp enters. He is a slight, stoop-shouldered, thin-faced man of about fifty. When he takes off his derby hat he reveals a long narrow head almost completely bald with a thin line of gray hair extending over his large ears around the back of his head. His face has been tanned by the tropic sun—but now it seems a sickly yellow in the white glare of the lamp. His eyes are small, dark, and set close together; his nose stubby and of no particular shape; his mouth large and weak. He is dressed in a faded, brown suit and unshined tan shoes. His expression must be unusually depressed as he stands nervously fingering his drooping, gray moustache, for Mrs. Knapp looks at him sharply for a moment, then gets up quickly and goes over and kisses him.*)

MRS. KNAPP—(*Pulling out the arm chair from the other end of the table for him.*) "Come! Sit down! You look all worn out. You shouldn't

walk so much."

KNAPP—(*Sinking into the chair and speaking in a slow, dull voice.*) "I am a bit tired." (*He stares at the flowered patterns of the table cover for a moment—then sighs heavily.*)

MRS. KNAPP—"Whatever is the matter with you? You look as if you'd lost your last friend."

KNAPP—(*Pulling himself together and smiling feebly.*) "I guess I've got the blues. I get to thinking about how I've got to sail tomorrow on that long, lonesome trip, and how I won't see any of you for three months, and it sort of makes me feel bad. I wish I could throw up this job. I wish I was young enough to try something else."

CHARLIE—(*Who is slouched down in a chair with hands in his pockets speaks in his lowest, nicest voice.*) "Aw, cheer up, Pop! It won't seem long. I should think you'd be glad to get out of the cold weather. Gee, I wish't I had a chance."

KNAPP—(*Looking at him blankly.*) "Eh? What was that, Charlie? I didn't quite hear what you said."

CHARLIE—(*In his best bellow.*) "I said: Cheer up! It won't seem long."

KNAPP—(*Shaking his head sadly.*) "It's easy for you to say that. You're young." (*The shrill crying of a baby sounds from behind the green curtain of the alcove.*)

MRS. KNAPP—(*Turning on Charlie furiously.*)  
“There! You’re gone and done it with your big, loud mouth. I told you to speak lower.” (*Turning to her husband.*) “James, I wish you’d do something to make him behave. He don’t mind what I say at all. Look at him—sprawled all over the chair with his long legs stretched out for everybody to trip over. Is that the way to sit on a chair? Anybody’d think you were brought up in a barn. I declare I’m ashamed to have you go anywhere for fear you’d disgrace me.”

CHARLIE—“You’d needn’t worry. There’s no place for me to go—and if there was I wouldn’t go there with these old clothes on. Why don’t you ball out Pop? He couldn’t hear me, so I had to speak louder.”

KNAPP—(*With sudden irritation.*) “Of course I heard you. But I wasn’t paying any attention to what you said. I have other things to think about beside your chatter.” (*Charlie sulks back in his chair.*)

MRS. KNAPP—“That’s right James. I knew you’d have to tell him where he belongs. You’d think he owned the house the way he acts.” (*A piercing wail comes from behind the curtain and Mrs. Knapp hurries there saying:*) “Hush! Hush! I’m coming.” (*She can be heard soothing the baby.*)

CHARLIE—(*Plucking up his courage now that his mother is out of the room.*) "Say, Pop!"

KNAPP—"Well, Charlie, what is it?"

CHARLIE—"Please can I have a new suit of clothes? Gee, I need 'em bad enough. This one is full of patches and holes and all the other kids down at the store laugh at me 'cause I ain't got long pants on and these don't fit me any more. Please can I have a new suit, Pop?"

KNAPP—(*A look of pain crossing his features.*) "I'm afraid not just now, boy." (*Charlie descends into the depths of gloom.*) "You see, I've had to go to this doctor about." (*He hesitates.*) "The—er—trouble I've had with my stomach, and he's very expensive. But when I come back from this trip I'll surely buy you a fine new suit with long pants the very first thing I do. I promise it to you and you know I don't break my promises. Try and get along with that one until I get back."

CHARLIE—(*Ruefully.*) "All right, Pop. I'll try, but I'm afraid it's going to bust if I get any bigger."

KNAPP—"That's a good boy. We haven't been having much luck lately and we've all got to stand for our share of doing without things. I may have to do without a lot—" (*He turns his face away to hide his emotion from Charlie. A sob shakes his shoulders. Charlie notices it and goes over*

*clumsily and pats his father on the back.)*

CHARLIE—"Gee, Pop, what's the matter? I can get along without a suit all right. I wouldn't have asked you if I thought you was so blue."

KNAPP—"Never mind me, boy. I'm just not feeling well, that's all—something I must have eaten—or a touch of fever." (*He glances at the clock.*) "It's getting pretty late, Charlie, and you've got to be up early in the morning. Better go to bed. Your mother and I have a lot to talk about yet—things which wouldn't interest you."

CHARLIE—"All right, Pop. Good night. I'll see you in the morning before I go."

KNAPP—"Good night and—remember I'm trying to do the best I know how." (*Charlie disappears behind the green curtain. Knapp stares at the table, his head between his hands, his face full of suffering. Mrs. Knapp comes back into the room. The baby is safely asleep again.*)

MRS. KNAPP—"You sent Charlie to bed, didn't you?" (*He nods.*) "That's right. He stays up altogether too late nights. He's always prowlin' around the streets. I don't know what will become of him I'm sure. Dolly told me tonight she saw him buyin' soda for that red-headed Harris girl with the quarter you gave him. What do you think of that? And he says he saw her talkin' in the dark hallway downstairs with some German bar-

tender's boy. What do you think of that?"

KNAPP—(*Mildly.*) "Where's the hurt? They're only kids and they've got to have some fun."

MRS. KNAPP—"Fun? I'm glad you call it fun. I think it disgraceful."

KNAPP—"Come, come, you exaggerate everything so. I see no harm in it. God knows I have enough to worry about without being bothered with children's pranks."

MRS. KNAPP—(*Scornfully.*) "You have worries? And what are they, I'd like to know? You sail away and have a fine time with nothin' to do but eat the best of food and talk to the pretty women in the First Class. Worries? I wish you'd stay home and change places with me—cookin', scrubbin', takin' care of the children, puttin' off the grocer and the butcher, doin' washin' and savin' every penny. You'd soon find out what worry meant then."

KNAPP—(*Placatingly.*) "I know you have to put up with a lot, Mary, and I wish I could do something to make it easier for you." (*Brokenly.*) "I don't know what's going to become of us—now."

MRS. KNAPP—"Oh, we'll manage to get along as we have been doin', I expect."

KNAPP—"But—Mary—something terrible has happened. I'm almost afraid to tell you."

MRS. KNAPP—"What do you mean? You

haven't lost your job, have you?"

KNAPP—"I went to see that ear specialist and—" *(His emotion chokes him; he stops to regain his composure.)*

MRS. KNAPP—"Yes?"

KNAPP—*(His voice breaking in spite of himself.)* "He says I'm losing my hearing—that I'm liable to go stone deaf at any moment." *(He lets his head fall on his arms with a sob.)*

MRS. KNAPP—*(Coming over and putting her arm around him.)* "There Jim! Don't take on about it so. All those doctors make things worse than they really are. He's just tryin' to scare you so you'll keep comin' to see him. Why, you can hear just as well as I can."

KNAPP—"No, I've noticed how hard it's been for me to catch some of the messages lately. And since I've been home I've had a hard time of it now and then to understand the children. The doctor said I would probably be able to hear for a long time yet but I got to be prepared for a sudden shock which'll leave me stone deaf."

MRS. KNAPP—*(Quickly.)* "Does anyone on the ship know?"

KNAPP—"Of course not. If they knew my hearing was going back on me I wouldn't hold my job a minute." *(His voice trembles.)* "But I've got to tell them now. I've got to give up."

MRS. KNAPP—"You didn't tell the specialist what you were, did you?"

KNAPP—"No. I said I was a mechanist?"

MRS. KNAPP—(*Getting up from her chair and speaking in a hard voice.*) "Then why have you got to tell them? If you don't tell them they'll never know. You say yourself the doctor told you your hearin' would hold out for a long time yet."

KNAPP—"He said 'probably.'"

MRS. KNAPP—(*An angry flush spreading over her face.*) "Give up your job? Are you a fool? Are you such a coward that a doctor can scare you like that?"

KNAPP—"I'm not afraid for myself. I'm not afraid of being deaf if I have to be. You don't understand. You don't know the responsibility of a man in my job."

MRS. KNAPP—"Responsibility? You've told me lots of times there was so few messages to send and take you wondered why they had a wireless. What's the matter with you all of a sudden? You're not deaf now and even if that liein' doctor spoke the truth you'll hear for a long time yet. He only told you about that sudden stroke to keep you comin' to him. I know the way they talk."

KNAPP—(*Protesting weakly.*) "But it ain't right. I ought to tell them and give up the job. Maybe I can get work at something else."



MRS. KNAPP—(*Furiously.*) "Right? And I suppose you think it's right to loaf around here until we all get put out in the streets? God knows your salary is small enough but without it we'd starve to death. Can't you think of others besides yourself? How about me and the children? What's goin' to buy them clothes and food? I can't earn enough and what Charlie gets wouldn't keep *him* alive for a week. Jim sends us a few dollars a month but he don't get much and he ain't workin' regular. We owe the grocer and the butcher now. If they found out you wasn't workin' they wouldn't give us any more credit. And the landlord? How long would he let us stay here? You'll get other work? Remember the last time you tried. We had to pawn everything we had then and we was half-starved when you did land this job. You had to go back to the same old work, didn't you? They didn't want you at any telegraph office, did they? You was too old and slow, wasn't you? Well you're older and slower than ever now and that's the only other job you're fit for." (*With bitter scorn.*) "You'll get another job!" (*She sits down and covers her face with her hands, weeping bitterly.*) "And this is all the thanks I get for slavin' and workin' my fingers off! What a father for my poor children! Oh, why did I ever marry such a man? It's been nothin' but worryin' and sufferin' ever since."

KNAPP—(*Who has been writhing under the lash of her scorn, is tortured beyond endurance at her last reproaches.*) "For God's sake let me alone! I'll go! I'll go! But this is going to be my last trip. I got to do the right thing." (*He gets up and pushes aside the green curtain.*) "Come on! I'm going to bed." (*He leaves Mrs. Knapp alone. She lifts her tear-stained face from her hands and sighs with relief as she turns out the gas.*)

## SCENE II

Scene—*A section of the boat deck of the S. S. "Empress" just abaft of the bridge. The deck slants sharply downward in the direction of the bow. To the left the officer's cabins with several lighted port holes. Just in back of them and in the middle of the deck is the wireless room with its door wide open revealing James Knapp bent over his instrument on the forward side of the compartment. His face is pale and set, and he is busy sending out calls, pausing every now and then with a strained expression as if he were vainly trying to catch some answer to his messages. Every time he taps on the key the snarl of the wireless sounds above the confused babble of frightened voices that rises from the promenade deck. To the right of the wireless room on the port side a life-raft. Still farther to the right*

*one of the funnels. The background is a tropic sky blazing with stars. The wires running up from the wireless room to the foremast may be seen dimly lined against the sky. The time is about eleven o'clock.*

*Captain Hardwick enters hurriedly from the direction of the bridge and walks across to the door of the wireless room where he stands looking in at Knapp. He is a stocky man about fifty dressed in a simple blue uniform. His face is reddened by sun and wind—that is, all of it which is not hidden by his grey beard and mustache. He drums nervously on the door. Knapp pretends not to see him and appears absorbed in his instrument.*

CAPT. HARDWICK—"No answer yet?" (*Knapp does not reply and the Captain leans over impatiently and shakes him by the shoulder.*) "I asked you if there was any answer yet?"

KNAPP—(*Looking at him furtively.*) "I haven't heard a thing yet, sir."

CAPT. HARDWICK—"Damnation? What in hell is the matter with them? Are they all asleep?"

KNAPP—"I'll try again sir." (*He taps on the key before him and the whine of the wireless shrills out discordantly.*)

CAPT. HARDWICK—(*Turning away with a muttered oath.*) "Well, I've got to get back on the bridge. Let me know the moment you catch any-

one."

KNAPP—(*Who has been watching his lips move.*)  
"Yes, sir." (*His tone is vague as if he were guessing at the answer.*)

CAPT. HARDWICK—"Tell 'em we hit a derelict and are sinking. Make it as strong as you can. We need help and we need it right away."

KNAPP—(*More vaguely than ever.*) "Yes sir."

CAPT. HARDWICK—"You surely ought to get the 'Verdari.' She can't be more than a hundred miles away if my reckoning is correct." (*Turning away again.*) "I've got to go. Keep sending until you get an answer."

KNAPP—"Yes sir."

CAPT. HARDWICK—(*In under his breath.*)  
"Damn your 'yes sirs.' I believe you're frightened out of your wits." (*He walks quickly toward the bridge. Half-way across the deck he is met by Mason the first Officer, a tall, clean-shaven, middle-aged man in uniform who hurries in from forward.*)  
"Well, Mason, how do things look below?"

MASON—"Very bad sir. I'm afraid the bulkhead can't hold out much longer. They're doing all they can to strengthen it but it don't look to me as if it would stand the pressure. I wouldn't give it more than half an hour—an hour at most, sir."

CAPT. HARDWICK—"She's listing pretty badly.

Guess you're right, Mason. When that bulkhead goes it's only a question of five or ten minutes. Are the crew all ready to man the boats?"

MASON—"Yes sir."

CAPT. HARDWICK—"Good! Passengers all on deck and ready to leave?"

MASON—"Yes sir."

CAPT. HARDWICK—"Good! Lucky there's only a few of them or we'd be in a nice mess. Lucky it's a calm night too. There'll be no panic." (*There is a pause broken only by the confused sound of voices from below.*) "Damned funny we get no reply to our calls for help, eh? Don't you think so?"

MASON—"Very funny, sir. The 'Verdari' ought to be right around here about this time. There ought to be four or five vessels we could reach, I should think."

CAPT. HARDWICK—"Just what I told Knapp. The poor devil seems scared to death because he can't get an answer. All he says every time I ask him is:" (*Mimicking Knapp.*) "Haven't heard a thing yet, sir!"

MASON—"He's told me the same thing three or four times. I don't like the looks of it, sir. He appears to act queer to me."

CAPT. HARDWICK—"You're right. He has been strange all during the trip—didn't seem to want to

speak to anyone. I thought he must be sick. Think it's drink?"

MASON—"No sir. I never saw him touch a drop—even on shore."

CAPT. HARDWICK—"Let's see what he's got to say now. By God, we've got to get a message in soon or there'll be the devil to pay." (*They both go over to the wireless room where Knapp is frenziedly sending out call after call. The Captain goes into the compartment and stands beside Knapp. Mason remains outside the door. Knapp looks up and sees them. He glances fearfully from one to the other.*)

CAPT. HARDWICK—"Caught the 'Verdari' yet?"

KNAPP—(*In the uncertain tone he had used before.*) "I haven't heard a thing yet, sir."

CAPT. HARDWICK—"Are you sure there's nothing wrong with this machine of yours?"

KNAPP—(*Bewilderedly.*) "No sir. Not a single answer, sir. I can't account for it, sir."

CAPT. HARDWICK—(*Angrily.*) "I know that. You've told me often enough. Answer my question? (*Knapp looks at him with puzzled eyes; then turns to the key of his instrument. Capt. Hardwick grabs him by the shoulder.*) "Did you hear what I said? Dammit, answer my question."

KNAPP—(*His lips trembling.*) "No sir."

CAPT. HARDWICK—(*Furiously.*) "What?"

MASON—(*Interposing.*) "Excuse me, sir, but something's wrong with the man. I don't think he heard what you said."

CAPT. HARDWICK—"The coward is frightened silly—that's what's the matter." (*Bending down he shouts against the receivers which Knapp has over both his ears.*) "Say something, can't you? Are you deaf?" (*Knapp shrinks away from him, his face ashy with fear, but does not answer.*)

MASON—"Maybe it's those things on his ears, sir."

CAPT. HARDWICK—(*Taking hold of the metal loops that go over Knapp's head and jerking the receivers off his ears.*) "Now! Answer me! What in hell's the matter with you?" (*Then his voice softening a bit.*) "If you're sick, why don't you say so?"

KNAPP—(*Looking at him helplessly for a moment—then hiding his face in his arms and weeping hysterically.*) "Oh my God! it's come!" (*The Captain and Mason look at each other in amazement as Knapp blurts out between his sobs.*) "I wasn't sure. I was hoping against hope. I can't hear a word you say. I can't hear anything. It's happened just as the doctor said it might." (*Looking up at the Captain and clasping and unclasping his hands piteously.*) "Oh, I should have told you, sir, before we started—but we're so poor and I

couldn't get another job. I was just going to make this one more trip. I wanted to give up the job this time but she wouldn't let me. She said I wanted them to starve—and Charlie asked me for a suit.” (*His sobs stifle him.*) “Oh God, who would have dream't this could have happened—at such a time. I thought it would be all right—just this trip. I'm not a bad man, Captain. And now I'm deaf—stone deaf. I can't hear what you say. I'm deaf! Oh my God! My God!” (*He flings his arms on the instrument in front of him and hides his face on them, sobbing bitterly.*)

CAPT. HARDWICK—(*Turning to Mason.*) “Well, I'll be damned! What do you make of this?”

MASON—“I guess what he says is true, sir. He's gone deaf. That's why we've had no answer to our calls.”

CAPT. HARDWICK—(*Fuming helplessly.*) “What in hell can we do? I must know they're coming for us before I send the boats away.” (*He thinks a moment. Suddenly his face lights up and he strikes his fist into his open palm.*) “By God, I've got it. You know Dick Whitney?” (*Mason nods.*) “Operator of the ‘Duchess’—been laid up in Bahia with fever—came on board there—going home on vacation—he's in the First Cabin—run and get him.” (*Mason runs down deck toward bridge.*)



"Hurry, for God's sake!" (*Mason is gone. Captain Hardwick turns to Knapp and lifting him by the arms helps him out of cabin and sits him down on the life-raft. Pats him roughly on back.*) "Brace up! Poor beggar!" (*Knapp continues to sob brokenly. Mason reappears followed by Dick Whitney, a thin, sallow-faced young fellow of about twenty-five, wearing a light sack suit. He shows the effect of his recent battle with tropical fever but he walks over to the wireless room confidently enough and takes his seat before the instrument.*)

CAPT. HARDWICK—"Get some one quick, Whitney. Tell 'em we're just about to launch the boats."

WHITNEY—(*Who has put the receivers over his ears.*) "They're calling us now, sir." (*He sends answering call—a pause.*) "It's the 'Verdari.'"

CAPT. HARDWICK—"Good! I knew she ought to be near us."

WHITNEY—"Operator says they're coming full speed—ought to reach us before daylight—wants to know if we can't keep up till then."

CAPT. HARDWICK—"No. Tell them the bulkhead almost gone. We're due to sink within an hour at most." (*To Mason.*) "Better go down and see how things are below." (*Mason leaves hurriedly.*)

WHITNEY—"All right, sir." (*He taps on the key—the wail of the wireless sounds again—then a pause.*)

CAPT. HARDWICK—"What do they say now?"

WHITNEY—(*With a slight smile.*) "'Hard luck.'"

CAPT. HARDWICK—(*Exploding.*) "Damn their sympathy!"

WHITNEY—"The operator says he's been trying to communicate with us for a long time. He got our messages all right but we never seemed to get his." (*The Capt. glances at Knapp who is still sitting on the life-raft with his face hidden in his hands.*) "He says he got a call from one of the Fruit Co.'s boats. She's rushing to help us too. He wants to know if we've heard anything from her."

CAPT. HARDWICK—"No." (*He looks at Knapp again, then speaks dryly.*) "Tell him our receiving apparatus has been out of order."

WHITNEY—(*Looks up in surprise—then sends the message—there is a pause.*) "He asks if we're sure it was a derelict we struck—says the 'Verdari' sighted one about where we are now yesterday and he sent out warnings to all vessels he could reach—says he tried to get us especially because he knew we passed this way; but if our receiving end was bad that explains it."

CAPT. HARDWICK—(*Staring at Knapp.*) "By God!"

WHITNEY—"Anything more you want to say, sir?"

CAPT. HARDWICK—(*Mechanically.*) "Tell them to hurry, that's all." (*Suddenly in a burst of rage he strides toward Knapp and raises his fist as if to strike him. Mason comes in from astern and steps in between them. Capt. Hardwick glares at him for a moment—then recovers himself.*) "You're right, Mason. I won't touch him; but that miserable, cowardly shrimp has lost my ship for me." (*His face plainly shows how much this loss means to him. Mason does not understand what he means. Capt. Hardwick turns to the wireless room again where young Whitney is sitting expectantly awaiting orders.*) "Say Whitney! Write out that last message from the 'Verdari' about her sending out warnings of that derelict yesterday—warnings which we didn't get. Put down how the operator on the 'Verdari' tried especially to warn us because he knew we would pass this way." (*Mason now understands and turns from Knapp with a glance full of scorn. Whitney writes rapidly on the report pad near him and hands the sheet to the Capt. who walks over to Knapp and shaking him, holds the message out. Knapp takes it in a trembling hand.*)

MASON—"I've got all the men up from below,

sir. The bulkhead's ready to go any minute. Shall I get some of the boats away, sir?"

CAPT. HARDWICK—"Yes." (*Mason starts astern.*) "Wait a moment. I'm coming with you. Come on Whitney. You can't do any good there any longer." (*He stops in front of Knapp as he walks toward the stern. Knapp is staring at the paper in his hand with wild eyes and pale, twitching features. Capt. Hardwick motions to him to follow them. They go off to right. Knapp sits still with the sheet of paper in his hand. The creaking of blocks is heard and Mason's voice shouting orders.*)

KNAPP—(*In a hoarse whisper.*) "God! It's my fault then! It's my fault!" (*He staggers weakly to his feet.*) "What if the ship is lost!" (*He looks astern where they are lowering the boats—his face is convulsed with horror—he gives a bitter cry of despair.*) "O-o-h! They're lowering the boats! She is lost! She is lost!" (*He stumbles across the deck into the wireless room, pulls out a drawer, and takes out a revolver, which he presses against his temple.*) "She is lost!" (*There is a sharp report and Knapp falls forward on his face on the floor before his instrument. His body twitches for a moment, then is still. The operator Whitney comes running in from the right calling:* "Knapp! They're waiting for you." *He gives one*

*horrified glance at the body in the room; says "Good God!" in a stupified tone, and then, seized with sudden terror, rushes astern again.)*

*CURTAIN*

# FOG

## A PLAY IN ONE ACT

### *CHARACTERS*

*A Poet*

*A Man of Business*

*A Polish Peasant Woman*

*A Dead Child*

*The Third Officer of a Steamer*

*Sailors from the Steamer*

*Time—The Present*



## FOG

*The life-boat of a passenger steamer is drifting helplessly off the Grand Banks of Newfoundland. A dense fog lies heavily upon the still sea. There is no wind and the long swells of the ocean are barely perceptible. The surface of the water is shadowy and unreal in its perfect calmness. A menacing silence, like the genius of the fog, broods over everything.*

*Three figures in the boat are darkly outlined against the gray background of vapor. Two are seated close together on the thwarts in the middle. The other is huddled stiffly at one end. None of their faces can be distinguished.*

*Day is just about to break and as the action progresses the vague twilight of dawn creeps over the sea. This, in turn, is succeeded by as bright a semblance of daylight as can sift through the thick screen of fog.*

**A MAN'S VOICE—***(Appallingly brisk and breezy under the circumstances.) "Brrr! I wish daylight would come. I'm beginning to feel pretty chilly. How about you?" (He receives no answer and raises his voice, the fear of solitude suddenly alive*



*within him.*) "Hello there! You haven't gone to sleep, have you?"

ANOTHER MAN'S VOICE—(*More refined than the first, clear and unobtrusively melancholy.*) "No, I'm not asleep."

FIRST VOICE—(*Complacently reassured.*) "Thought you might have dozed off. I did a while ago—eyes refused to stay open any longer—couldn't imagine where I was when I woke up—had forgotten all about the damned wreck."

SECOND VOICE—"You are fortunate to be able to sleep. I wish I could go to sleep and forget—all this—"

FIRST VOICE—"Oh come now! You mustn't keep thinking about it. That won't do any good. Brace up! We're sure to get out of this mess all right. I've figured it all out. You know how long a time it was between the time we hit the derelict—it was a derelict we hit, wasn't it?"

SECOND VOICE—"I believe so."

FIRST VOICE—"Well, the wireless was going all the time, if you remember, and one of the officers told me we had lots of answers from ships saying they were on the way to help us. One of them is sure to pick us up."

SECOND VOICE—"In this fog?"

FIRST VOICE—"Oh this'll all go away as soon as the sun goes up. I've seen plenty like it at my

country place on the Connecticut shore, maybe not as thick as this one but nearly as bad, and when the sun came up they always disappeared before the morning was over."

SECOND VOICE—"You forget we are now near the Grand Banks, the home of fog."

FIRST VOICE—(*With a laugh that is a bit troubled.*) "I must say you aren't a very cheerful companion. Why don't you look at the bright side?" (*A pause during which he is evidently thinking over what the other man has told him.*) "The Grand Banks? Hmm, well, I refuse to be scared."

THE SECOND VOICE—"I have no intention of making our situation seem worse than it really is. I have every hope that we will eventually be rescued but it's better not to expect too much. It only makes disappointment more bitter when it comes."

FIRST VOICE—"I suppose you're right but I can't help being optimistic."

SECOND VOICE—"You remember how downcast you were yesterday when we failed to hear any sound of a ship? Today is liable to be the same unless this fog lifts. So don't hope for too much."

FIRST VOICE—"Your're forgetting the fact that there was no sun yesterday. That kind of weather can't last forever."

SECOND VOICE—(*Dryly.*) "Perhaps we could not see the sun on account of the fog."

FIRST VOICE—(*After a pause.*) "I'll admit I did feel pretty dismal yesterday—after that terrible thing happened."

SECOND VOICE—(*Softly.*) "You mean after the child died?"

FIRST VOICE—(*Gloomily.*) "Yes. I thought that woman would never stop crying. Ugh! It was awful—her cries, and the fog, and not another sound anywhere."

SECOND VOICE—"It was the most horrible thing I have ever seen or even heard of. I never dreamed anything could be so full of tragedy."

FIRST VOICE—"It was enough to give anyone the blues, that's sure. Besides my clothes were wet and I was freezing cold and you can imagine how merry I felt." (*Grumbling.*) "Not that they're any dryer now but somehow I feel warmer."

SECOND VOICE—(*After a long pause.*) "So you think the child's death was a terrible thing?"

FIRST VOICE—(*In astonishment.*) "Of course. Why? Don't you?"

SECOND VOICE—"No."

FIRST VOICE—"But you said just a minute ago that—"

SECOND VOICE—"I was speaking of the grief and despair of the mother. But death was kind to the child. It saved him many a long year of sordid drudgery."

FIRST VOICE—"I don't know as I agree with you there. Everyone has a chance in this world; but we've all got to work hard, of course. That's the way I figure it out."

SECOND VOICE—"What chance had that poor child? Naturally sickly and weak from underfeeding, transplanted to the stinking room of a tenement or the filthy hovel of a mining village, what glowing opportunities did life hold out that death should not be regarded as a blessing for him? I mean if he possessed the ordinary amount of ability and intelligence—considering him as the average child of ignorant Polish immigrants. Surely his prospects of ever becoming anything but a beast of burden were not bright, were they?"

FIRST VOICE—"Well, no, of course not, but—"

SECOND VOICE—"If you could bring him back to life would you do so? Could you conscientiously drag him away from that fine sleep of his to face what he would have to face? Leaving the joy you would give his mother out of the question, would you do it for him individually?"

FIRST VOICE—(*Doubtfully.*) "Perhaps not, looking at it from that standpoint."

SECOND VOICE—"There is no other standpoint. The child was diseased at birth, stricken with a hereditary ill that only the most vital men are able to shake off."

FIRST VOICE—"You mean?"

SECOND VOICE—"I mean poverty—the most deadly and prevalent of all diseases."

FIRST VOICE—(*Amused.*) "Oh, that's it, eh? Well, it seems to be a pretty necessary sickness and you'll hardly find a cure for it. I see you're a bit of a reformer."

SECOND VOICE—"Oh no. But there are times when the frightful injustice of it all sickens me with life in general."

FIRST VOICE—"I find life pretty good. I don't know as I'd change it even if I could."

SECOND VOICE—"Spoken like a successful man. For I'm sure you are a successful man, are you not? I mean in a worldly way."

FIRST VOICE—(*Flattered.*) "Yes, you might call me so, I guess. I've made my little pile but it was no easy time getting it, let me tell you."

SECOND VOICE—"You had some advantages, did you not? Education and plenty to eat, and a clean home, and so forth?"

FIRST VOICE—"I went to high school and of course had the other things you mentioned. My people were not exactly what you could call poor but they were certainly not rich. Why do you ask?"

SECOND VOICE—"Do you think you would be as successful and satisfied with life if you had started with handicaps like those which that poor dead child

would have had to contend with if he had lived?"

FIRST VOICE—(*Impatiently.*) "Oh, I don't know! What's the use of talking about what might have happened? I'm not responsible for the way the world is run."

SECOND VOICE—"But supposing you are responsible?"

FIRST VOICE—"What!"

SECOND VOICE—"I mean supposing we—the self-satisfied, successful members of society—are responsible for the injustice visited upon the heads of our less fortunate 'brothers-in-Christ' because of our shameful indifference to it. We see misery all around us and we do not care. We do nothing to prevent it. Are we not then, in part at least, responsible for it? Have you ever thought of that?"

FIRST VOICE—(*In tones of annoyance.*) "No, and I'm not going to start in thinking about it now."

SECOND VOICE—(*Quietly.*) "I see. It's a case of what is Hecuba to you that you should weep for her."

FIRST VOICE—(*Blankly.*) "Hecuba? Oh, you mean the woman. You can't accuse me of any heartlessness there. I never felt so sorry for anyone in my life. Why I was actually crying myself at one time I felt so sorry for her. By the way, she hasn't made a sound since it got dark last evening.

Is she asleep? Can you see her? You're nearer to her than I am."

*(It is becoming gradually lighter although the fog is as thick as ever. The faces of the two men in the boat can be dimly distinguished—one round, jowly, and clean-shaven; the other oval with big dark eyes and a black mustache and black hair pushed back from his high forehead. The huddled figure at the end of the boat is clearly that of a woman. One arm is flung over her face concealing it. In the other she clutches something like a bundle of white clothes.)*

THE DARK MAN—*(He of the Second Voice who is seated on the thwart nearer to the woman—turning round and peering in her direction.)* "She is very still. She must be asleep. I hope so, poor woman!"

THE OTHER MAN—"Yes, a little sleep will do her a world of good."

THE DARK MAN—"She still holds the body of the child close to her breast." *(He returns to his former position facing the Other Man.)* "I suppose you—"

THE OTHER MAN—*(Exultingly.)* "Excuse my interrupting you but have you noticed how light it's getting? It didn't strike me until you turned around just now. I can see your face plainly and a few minutes ago I couldn't tell whether you were a

blond or brunette."

THE DARK MAN—"Now if this fog would only lift—"

THE OTHER MAN—"It's going to lift. You wait and see. You'll find my optimism is justified. But what was it you started to say?"

THE DARK MAN—"I was saying that I supposed you had never seen this woman on board."

THE OTHER MAN—"No. I was in the smoking room playing bridge most of the time. I'm not much of a sailor—don't care much about the water—just went over to Europe because the wife and the girls insisted. I was bored to death—made an excuse to get away as soon as I could. No sir, you can't teach an old dog new tricks. I'm a business man pure and simple and the farther I get away from that business the more dissatisfied I am. I've built that business up from nothing and it's sort of like a child of mine. It gives me pleasure to watch over it and when I'm away I'm uneasy. I don't like to leave it in strange hands. As for travelling, little old New York in the U. S. A. is good enough for me." *(He pauses impressively, waiting for some word of approval for his sterling patriotic principles. The Dark Man is silent and he of the U. S. A. continues, a bit disconcerted.)* "But you asked me if I had seen the woman. I don't think so because I never went down into the



steerage. I know some of the first class passengers did but I wasn't curious. It's a filthy sort of hole, isn't it?"

THE DARK MAN—"It's not so bad. I spent quite a good deal of my time down there."

THE BUSINESS MAN—(*For he of the jowly, fat face and the bald spot is such by his own confession.*) (*Chuckling.*) "In your role of reformer?"

THE DARK MAN—"No. Simply because I found the people in the steerage more interesting to talk to than the second class passengers. I am not a reformer—at least not in the professional sense."

THE BUSINESS MAN—"Do you mind my asking what particular line you are in?"

THE DARK MAN—"I am a writer."

THE BUSINESS MAN—"I thought it was something of the kind. I knew you weren't in business when I heard those Socialistic ideas of yours." (*Condescendingly.*) "Beautiful idea—Socialism—but too impractical—never come about—just a dream."

THE DARK MAN—"I'm not a Socialist—especially—just a humanist, that is all."

THE BUSINESS MAN—"What particular kind of writing do you do?"

THE DARK MAN—"I write poetry."

THE BUSINESS MAN—(*In a tone indicating*

*that in his mind poets and harmless lunatics have more than one point in common.)* "Oh I see. Well, there's not much money in that, is there?"

THE POET—"No."

THE BUSINESS MAN—(*After a long pause.*) "I don't know about you but I'm beginning to feel hungry. Is that box of crackers near you?" (*The Poet reaches in under a thwart and pulls out a box of sea-biscuits. The Business Man takes a handful and munches greedily.*) "Never thought hard-tack could taste so good. Aren't you going to have any?"

THE POET—"No. I am not hungry. The thought of that poor woman takes all my hunger away. I used to watch her every day down in the steerage playing with her little son who is now dead. I think he must have been the only child she ever had, the look on her face was so wonderfully tender as she bent over him. What will her life be now that death has robbed her of the only recompense for her slavery? It seems such needless cruelty. Why was I not taken instead?—I, who have no family or friends to weep, and am not afraid to die."

THE BUSINESS MAN—(*His mouth full.*) "You take things to heart too much. That's just like a poet. She'll forget all about it—probably sooner than you will. One forgets everything in time. What a devil of a world it would be if we didn't."

*(He takes another handful of sea-biscuits and continues his munching. The Poet turns away from him in disgust.)* "Funny thing when you come to think of it—I mean how we happened to come together in this boat. It's a mystery to me how she ever got in here. And then, how is it there's no oars in this boat and still there's plenty of food? You remember there was no lack of life-boats, and after the women and children were taken off I was ordered into one and we were rowed away. The damned thing must have gotten smashed somehow for it leaked like a sieve and in spite of our bailing we were soon dumped in the water. I heard the noise of voices near us and tried to swim to one of the other boats, but I must have got twisted in the fog for when I did find a boat—and let me tell you I was pretty nearly 'all in' about then—it was this one and you and she were in it. Now what I want to know is—"

THE POET—"It is easily explained. Did you ever become so sick of disappointment and weary of life in general that death appeared to you the only way out?"

THE BUSINESS MAN—"Hardly. But what has that to do—"

THE POET—"Listen and you will see. That is the way I felt—sick and weary of soul and longing for sleep. When the ship struck the derelict it

seemed to me providential. Here was the solution I had been looking for. I would go down with the ship and that small part of the world which knew me would think my death an accident."

THE BUSINESS MAN—(*Forgetting to eat in his amazement.*) "You mean to say you were going to commit—"

THE POET—"I was going to die, yes. So I hid in the steerage fearing that some of the ship's officers would insist on saving my life in spite of me. Finally when everyone had gone I came out and walked around the main deck. I heard the sound of voices come from a dark corner and discovered that this woman and her child had been left behind. How that happened I don't know. Probably she hid because she was afraid the child would be crushed by the terror-stricken immigrants. At any rate there she was and I decided she was so happy in her love for her child that it would be wrong to let her die. I looked around and found this life-boat had been lowered down to the main deck and left hanging there. The oars had been taken out—probably for extra rowers in some other boat. I persuaded the woman to climb in and then went up to the boat deck and lowered the boat the rest of the way to the water. This was not much of a task for the steamer was settling lower in the water every minute. I then slid down one of the ropes to the boat and

cutting both of the lines that held her, pushed off. There was a faint breeze which blew us slowly away from the sinking ship until she was hidden in the fog. The suspense of waiting for her to go down was terrible. Even as it was we were nearly swamped by the waves when the steamer took her final plunge."

THE BUSINESS MAN—(*Edges away from the Poet, firmly convinced that his convictions regarding the similarity of poets and madmen are based upon fact.*) "I hope you've abandoned that suicide idea."

THE POET—"I have —absolutely. I think all that happened to me is an omen sent by the Gods to convince me my past unhappiness is past and my fortune will change for the better."

THE BUSINESS MAN—"That's the way to talk! Superstition is a good thing sometimes."

THE POET—"But if I had known the sufferings that poor woman was to undergo as a result of my reckless life-saving I would have let her go down with the ship and gone myself."

THE BUSINESS MAN—"Don't think of it any longer. You couldn't help that. I wonder what it was the child died of? I thought it was asleep when I heard it choke and cough—and the next minute *she* commenced to scream. I won't forget those screams for the rest of my life."

THE POET—"The child was naturally frail and delicate and I suppose the fright he received and the exposure combined to bring on some kind of convulsion. He was dead when I went over to see what was the matter."

THE BUSINESS MAN—(*Peering upward through the fog.*) "It's getting considerably lighter. It must be about time for the sun to rise—if we're going to have any sun."

THE POET—(*Sadly.*) "It was just about this time yesterday morning when the poor little fellow died."

THE BUSINESS MAN—(*Looks apprehensively toward the huddled figure in the end of the boat. Now that it is lighter what appeared before like a bundle of white clothes can be seen to be a child four or five years old with a thin, sallow face and long, black curls. The body is rigid, wrapped in a white shawl, and the eyes are open and glassy.*) "Let's not talk any more about it. She might wake up and start screaming again—and I can't stand that."

THE POET—"She does not understand English."

THE BUSINESS MAN—(*Shaking his head.*) "She'd know we were talking about the kid just the same. Mothers have an instinct when it comes to that. I've seen that proved in my own family more than once."

THE POET—"Have you ever lost any of your children?"

THE BUSINESS MAN—"No. Thank God!"

THE POET—"You may well thank God, even if people do, as you claimed a while ago, forget so easily."

THE BUSINESS MAN—"You're not married, are you?"

THE POET—"No."

THE BUSINESS MAN—"I didn't think you were." (*Jocularly.*) "You people with artistic temperaments run more to affinities than to wives. I suppose you've lots of those?"

THE POET—(*Does not hear or will not notice this question. He is staring through the fog and speaks in excited tones.*) "Did you hear that?"

THE BUSINESS MAN—"Hear what?"

THE POET—"Just now when you were talking. I thought I heard a sound like a steamer's whistle." (*They both listen intently. After a second or so the sound comes again, faint and far-off, wailing over the water.*)

THE BUSINESS MAN—(*Wildly elated.*) "By God, it is a steamer!"

THE POET—"It sounded nearer that time. She must be coming this way."

THE BUSINESS MAN—"Oh, if only this rotten fog would lift for a minute!"

THE POET—"Let's hope it will. We run as much risk of being run down as we do of being saved while this continues. They couldn't see us twenty feet away in this."

THE BUSINESS MAN—(*Nervously.*) "Can't we yell or make some kind of a noise?"

THE POET—"They couldn't hear us now. We can try when they get close to us." (*A pause during which they hear the steamer whistle again.*) "How cold the air is! Or is it my imagination?"

THE BUSINESS MAN—"No, I notice it too. I've been freezing to death for the last five minutes. I wish we had the oars so we could row and keep warm."

THE POET—"Sssh! Do you hear that?"

THE BUSINESS MAN—"What? The whistle? I heard it a moment ago."

THE POET—"No. This is a sound like running water. There! Don't you hear it now?" (*A noise as of water falling over rocks comes clearly through the fog.*)

THE BUSINESS MAN—"Yes, I hear it. What can it be? There isn't any water out here except what's under us." (*With a shiver.*) "Brrr, but it's chilly!"

THE POET—"That poor woman will be frozen when she wakes up." (*He takes off his ulster and walking carefully to the end of the boat covers the*



*form of the sleeping woman with it.)*

THE BUSINESS MAN—"It sounds louder every minute but I can't see anything. Damn this fog!" (*The noise of the falling water grows more and more distinct. At regular intervals the steamer's whistle blows and that, too, seems to be drawing nearer.*)

THE POET—(*Still bent over the sleeping woman.*) "Perhaps it may be land but I hardly think we could have drifted that far."

THE BUSINESS MAN—(*In terrified tones.*) "Good God, what's that?" (*The Poet turns quickly around. Something huge and white is looming up through the fog directly beside the boat. The boat drifts up to it sideways and strikes against it with a slight jar. The Business Man shrinks away as far along the thwart as he can get, causing the boat to tip a little to one side. The spattering splash of falling water sounds from all around them.*)

THE POET—(*Looking at the white mass towering above them.*) "An iceberg!" (*Turning to the Business Man.*) "Steady there! You will be in the water in a minute if you're not careful. There is nothing to be frightened over. Lucky for us it's calm or we would be smashed to pieces."

THE BUSINESS MAN—(*Reassured by finding out that what he took for some horrible phantom*

*of the sea is an ice and water reality, moves over to the center of his thwart and remarks sarcastically.)*  
"As it is we'll only freeze to death. Is that what you mean?"

THE POET—(*Thumping his hands against his sides.*) "It is cold. I wonder how big the berg is. Help me try to push the boat away from it."  
(*They push against the side of the berg. The boat moves away a little but drifts right back again.*)

THE BUSINESS MAN—"Ouch! My hands are freezing."

THE POET—"No use wasting effort on that. The boat is too heavy and you can get no grip on the ice." (*A blast of the steamer's whistle shrills thro' the fog. It sounds very close to them.*) "Oh God, I never thought of that." (*He sits down dejectedly opposite the Business Man.*)

THE BUSINESS MAN—"Never thought of what?"

THE POET—(*Excitedly.*) "The steamer, man, the steamer! Think of the danger she is in. If she were ever to hit this mass of ice she would sink before they could lower a boat."

THE BUSINESS MAN—"Can't we do something? We'll yell to them when they get nearer."

THE POET—"Oh my God, man, don't do that. This may be one of the rescue ships come to pick up the survivors from our boat, and if they heard any

shouts they would think they were cries for help and come right in this direction. Not a sound if you have any regard for the lives of those on board."

THE BUSINESS MAN—(*Almost whispering.*) "But if we don't let them know we're here they are liable to pass by us and never know it."

THE POET—(*Sternly.*) "We can die but we cannot risk the lives of others to save our own." (*The Business Man does not reply to this but a look of sullen stubbornness comes over his face. There is a long pause. The silence is suddenly shattered by a deafening blast from the steamer's whistle.*)

THE POET—"God! She must be right on top of us." (*They both start to their feet and stand straining their eyes to catch some glimpse of the approaching vessel through the blinding mist. The stillness is so intense that the throb of the engines can be plainly heard. This sound slowly recedes and the next whistle indicates by its lack of volume that the steamer has passed and is proceeding on her way.*)

THE BUSINESS MAN—(*Furiously.*) "She's going away. I'm not going to be left here to die on account of your damn fool ideas." (*He turns in the direction he supposes the steamer to be and raises his hands to his mouth, shaping them like a megaphone.*)

THE POET—(*Jumping over and forcing his hand*

*over the Business Man's mouth in time to stifle his call for help.) "You damned coward! I might have known what to expect." (The Business Man struggles to free himself, rocking the boat from side to side with his futile twistings, but he is finally forced down to a sitting position on the thwart. The Poet then releases him. He opens his mouth as if to shout but the Poet stands over him with his right fist drawn back threateningly and the Business Man thinks better of it.)*

THE BUSINESS MAN—(Snarling.) "I'll get even with you, you loafer, if we ever get on shore." (The Poet pays no attention to this threat but sits down opposite him. They hear the whistle again, seemingly no farther away than before. The Business Man stirs uneasily. A rending, tearing crash cracks through the silence, followed a moment later by a tremendous splash. Great drops of water fall in the rocking boat.)

THE BUSINESS MAN—(Trembling with terror.) "She must have hit it after all."

THE POET—"No. That can't be it. I don't hear any shouts." (Suddenly smiling with relief as he guesses what has happened.) "I know what it is. The berg is melting and breaking up. That was a piece that fell in the water."

THE BUSINESS MAN—"It almost landed on us." (He becomes panic-stricken at this thought and

*jumps to his feet.*) "I'm not going to stand this any longer. We'll be crushed like flies. I'll take a chance and swim for it. You can stay here and be killed if you want to." (*Insane with fear of this new menace he puts one foot on the gunwale of the boat and is about to throw himself into the water when the Poet grabs him by the arm and pulls him back.*) "Let me go! This is all right for you. You want to die. Do you want to kill me too, you murderer?" (*He hides his face in his hands and weeps like a fat child in a fit of temper.*)

THE POET—"You fool! You could not swim for five minutes in this icy water." (*More kindly.*) "Come! Be sensible! Act like a man!" (*The Business Man shakes with a combination of sigh and sob. The whistle blows again and seems once more to be in their immediate vicinity. The Business Man takes a new lease on life at this favorable sign and raises his head.*)

THE BUSINESS MAN—"She seems to be getting quite near us again."

THE POET—"Yes, and a moment ago I heard something like oars creaking in the oar-locks and striking the water."

THE BUSINESS MAN—(*hopefully.*) "Maybe they've lowered a boat." (*Even as he is speaking the curtain of fog suddenly lifts. The sun has just risen over the horizon rim and the berg behind them,*

*its surface carved and fretted by the streams of water from the melting ice, its whiteness vivid above the blue-gray water, seems like the facade of some huge Viking temple.)*

THE POET—(*He and the Business Man, their backs turned to the berg, are looking at something over the water as if they could hardly believe their good fortune.*) "There's the steamer now and she can hardly be more than a quarter of a mile away. What luck!"

THE BUSINESS MAN—"And there's the boat you heard. Look! They were rowing straight towards us."

THE POET—(*Half to himself with a puzzled expression.*) "I wonder how they knew we were here."

A VOICE FROM OVER THE WATER—"Hello there!"

THE BUSINESS MAN—(*Waving frantically.*) "Hello!"

THE VOICE—(*Nearer—the creak of the oars can be clearly heard.*) "Are you people off the 'Starland?'"

THE BUSINESS MAN—"Yes." (*With the return of his courage he has regained all his self-assured urbanity. He tries to pull his clothes into some semblance of their former immaculateness, and his round face with its imposing double chin assumes an expression of importance. The Poet's face is*

*drawn and melancholy as if he were uncertain of the outcome of this unexpected return to life.)*

THE BUSINESS MAN—(*Turning to the Poet with a smile.*) "You see my optimism was justified after all." (*Growing confused before the Poet's steady glance.*) "I wish you'd—er—forget all about the little unpleasantness between us. I must confess I was a bit—er—rattled and didn't exactly know what I was doing." (*He holds out his hand uncertainly. The Poet takes it with a quiet smile.*)

THE POET—(*Simply.*) "I had forgotten all about it."

THE BUSINESS MAN—"Thank you." (*The voice that hailed them is heard giving some orders. The sound of the oars ceases and a moment later a life-boat similar to the one they are in but manned by a full crew of sailors comes along side of them. A young man in uniform, evidently the third officer of the ship, is in the stern steering.*)

THE BUSINESS MAN—(*Breezily.*) "Hello! You certainly are a welcome sight."

THE OFFICER—(*Looking up at the towering side of the berg.*) "You picked out a funny island to land on. What made you cling so close to this berg? Cold, wasn't it?"

THE POET—"We drifted into it in the fog and having no oars could not get away. It was about the same time we first heard your whistle."

THE OFFICER—(*Nodding toward the woman's figure.*) "Woman sick?"

THE POET—"She has been asleep, poor woman."

THE OFFICER—"Where's the kid?"

THE POET—"In her arms." (*Then wondering-ly.*) "But how did you know?"

THE OFFICER—"We'd never have found you but for that. Why didn't you give us a shout or make some kind of a racket?"

THE BUSINESS MAN—(*Eagerly.*) "We were afraid you would come in our direction and hit this ice-berg."

THE OFFICER—"But we might have passed you and never had an inkling—"

THE BUSINESS MAN—(*Impressively.*) "In a case of that kind one has to take chances." (*The Poet smiles quietly. The Officer looks surprised.*)

THE OFFICER—"That was very fine of you I must say. Most people would only have thought of themselves. As it was, if it hadn't been for the kid crying we would have missed you. I was on the bridge with the first officer. We had been warned about this berg and when the fog came up we slowed down until we were barely creeping, and stopped altogether every now and then. It was during one of these stops when everything was still, we heard the crying and I said to the first officer: 'Sounds like a kid balling, doesn't it?' and he thought it



did too. It kept getting plainer and plainer until there was no chance for a mistake—weird too it sounded with everything so quiet and the fog so heavy—I said to him again: ‘It’s a kid sure enough, but how in the devil did it get out here?’ And then we both remembered we had been ordered to keep a lookout for any of the survivors of the ‘Starland’ who hadn’t been picked up yet, and the first officer said: ‘It’s probably some of the poor devils from the Starland’ and told me to have a boat lowered. I grabbed a compass and jumped in. We could hear the kid crying all the time, couldn’t we, boys?” *(He turns to the crew who all answer: “Yes sir.”)* “That’s how I was able to shape such a direct course for you. I was steering by the sound. It stopped just as the fog rose.” *(During the Officer’s story the Business Man has been looking at him with an expression of annoyed stupefaction on his face. He is unable to decide whether the Officer is fooling or not and turns to the Poet for enlightenment. But the latter, after listening to the Officer’s explanation with intense interest, goes quickly to the side of the woman and, removing his ulster from over her shoulders, attempts to awaken her.)*

THE OFFICER—*(Noticing what he is doing.)* “That’s right. Better wake her up. The steamer will be ready to pick us up in a minute, and she must be stiff with the cold.” *(He turns to one of*

his crew.) "Make a line fast to this boat and we'll tow her back to the ship." (*The sailor springs into the "Starland's" boat with a coil of rope in his hand.*)

THE POET—(*Failing to awaken the woman he feels for her pulse and then bends down to listen for a heart beat, his ear against her breast. He straightens up finally and stands looking down at the two bodies and speaks to himself half aloud.*) "Poor happy woman." (*The Officer and the Business Man are watching him.*)

THE OFFICER—(*Sharply.*) "Well?"

THE POET—(*Softly.*) "The woman is dead."

THE BUSINESS MAN—"Dead!" (*He casts a horrified glance at the still figures in the end of the boat—then clammers clumsily into the other boat and stands beside the officer.*)

THE OFFICER—"Too bad! But the child is all right, of course?"

THE POET—"The child has been dead for twenty-four hours. He died at dawn yesterday." (*It is the Officer's turn to the bewildered. He stares at the Poet pityingly and then turns to the Business Man.*)

THE OFFICER—(*Indicating the Poet with a nod of his head.*) "A bit out of his head, isn't he? Exposure affects a lot of them that way."

THE BUSINESS MAN—(*Solemnly.*) "He told

you the exact truth of the matter."

THE OFFICER—(*Concluding he has two madmen to deal with instead of one.*) "Of course."  
(*To the sailor who has made fast the towing rope.*)  
"All fast?" (*The sailor jumps into his own boat with a brisk: "Aye, Aye sir."*) (*The Officer turns to the Poet.*) "Coming in here or going to stay where you are?"

THE POET—(*Gently.*) "I think I will stay with the dead." (*He is sitting opposite the two rigid figures looking at their still white faces with eyes full of a great longing.*)

THE OFFICER—(*Mutters.*) "Cheerful beggar!"  
(*He faces the crew.*) "Give way all." (*The oars take the water and the two boats glide swiftly away from the ice berg.*)

*The fresh morning breeze ripples over the water bringing back to the attentive ear some words of the Man of Business spoken argumentatively, but in the decided accents of one who is rarely acknowledged to be wrong.)*

"—the exact truth. So you see that, if you will pardon my saying so, Officer, what you have just finished telling us is almost unbelievable."

## CURTAIN

# RECKLESSNESS

A PLAY IN ONE ACT

## CHARACTERS

*Arthur Baldwin*

*Mildred—His wife*

*Fred Burgess—Their chauffeur*

*Gene—Mrs. Baldwin's maid*

*Mary—A housemaid*



## RECKLESSNESS

*Scene—The library of Arthur Baldwin's summer home in the Catskills, N. Y. On the left a door and two large French windows opening on the veranda. A bookcase covers the space of wall between the two windows. In the corner is a square wicker-work table. The far side of the room also looks out on the veranda. Two French windows are on each side of a rolltop desk that stands against the wall. Near the desk a small telephone such as is used on estates to connect the house with the outbuildings. On top of the desk a Bell telephone and a small pile of letters. In the right background a divan, then a door leading to the hallway, and a long bookcase. A heavy oak table stands in the center of the room. On it are several magazines and books, an ash receiver, cigar box, etc., and an electric reading lamp wired from the chandelier above. Two Morris-chairs are within reading reach of the lamp and several light rocking chairs are placed about the room. The walls are of light wainscoting. The floor is of polished hard wood with a large darkish colored rug covering the greater part. Several pictures of a sporting nature, prin-*

*cipally of racing automobiles, are hung on the walls in the spaces between windows and bookcases.*

*The room is the typical sitting-room of a moderately wealthy man who has but little taste and is but little worried by its absence. On this warm August night with the door and all the windows thrown open, and only the reading lamp burning, it presents a cool and comfortable appearance.*

*It's about eight o'clock in the evening. The time is the present.*

*Mrs. Baldwin is discovered lying back in one of the Morris-chairs with an unopened book in her lap. She is holding her head on one side in an attitude of strained attention as if she were waiting for someone or something. In appearance she is a tall, strikingly voluptuous-looking young woman of about twenty-eight. Her hair is reddish-gold, almost a red, and her large eyes are of that dark greyish-blue color which is called violet. She is very pale—a clear transparent pallor that serves to accentuate the crimson of the full lips of her rather large mouth. She is dressed in a low-cut evening gown of a grey that matches her eyes. Her shoulders, neck and arms are beautiful.*

*MRS. BALDWIN—(Rousing herself with a sigh of vexation, goes to the wall on the right and pushes an electric button near the bookcase. After a mo-*

*ment a maid enters.)* "I won't wait any longer, Mary. He evidently isn't coming. You may clear the table. I won't eat anything now. I'll have something after a while."

MARY—"Very well, ma'am." *(She goes out.)*

MRS. BALDWIN—*(Looks around quickly to make sure she is alone, then locks the door to the hallway and, going to the door on the left opening on the verandah, calls in a low voice:)* "Fred." *(She beckons with her hand to someone who is evidently waiting outside. A moment later Fred Burgess comes quickly into the room. He throws a furtive glance around him—then reassured, takes Mrs. Baldwin in his arms and kisses her passionately on the lips. In appearance he is a tall, clean-shaven, dark-complected young fellow of twenty-five or so with clear-cut, regular features, big brown eyes and black curly hair. He is dressed in a gray chauffeur's uniform with black puttees around the calves of his legs.)*

MRS. BALDWIN—*(Putting her arms about his neck and kissing him again and again.)* "Oh Fred! Fred! I love you so much!"

FRED—"Ssh! Someone might hear you."

MRS. BALDWIN—"There's no one around. They're all in back having dinner. You've had your's?" *(He nods.)* "They won't expect you then. There's nothing to fear. I've locked the



door." (*He is reassured.*) "But you do love me, don't you, Fred?" (*He kisses her smilingly.*) "Oh I know! I know! But say so! I love to hear it."

FRED—(*Stroking her hair caressingly with one hand.*) "Of course I love you. You know I do, Mildred." (*Mrs. Baldwin's maid Gene appears noiselessly in the doorway from the verandah. They are looking raptly into each other's eyes and do not notice her. She glares at them for a moment, vindictive hatred shining in her black eyes. Then she disappears as quietly as she came.*)

MRS. BALDWIN—(*Brokenly.*) "I can't stand this life much longer Fred. These last two weeks while he has been away have been heaven to me but when I think of his coming back tonight—I—I could kill him!"

FRED—(*Worried by this sudden outbreak.*) "You musn't feel so badly about it. You—we have got to make the best of it, that's all."

MRS. BALDWIN—(*Reproachfully.*) "You take it very easily. Think of me."

FRED—(*Releasing her and walking nervously up and down the room.*) "You know, Mildred, I'd like to do something. But how can I help matters? I haven't any money. We can't go away together yet."

MRS. BALDWIN—"But I can get money—all the money we need."

FRED—(*Scornfully.*) "His money!"

MRS. BALDWIN—"I have my jewels. I can sell those."

FRED—"He gave you those jewels."

MRS. BALDWIN—"Oh, why are you so hard on me?" (*She sinks down in one of the Morris-chairs. He comes over and stands before her.*) "Why won't you let me help a little?"

FRED—"I don't want to touch any of his money." (*Kneeling beside her he puts one arm around her—then with sudden passion.*) "I want you! God, how I want you! But I can't do that!" (*He leans over and kisses her bare neck. She gives a long shuddering gasp, her white fingers closing and unclosing in his dark curls. He gets suddenly to his feet.*) "We'll have to wait and love when we can for awhile. I promise you it won't be long. I worked my way this far and I don't intend to stop here. As soon as I've passed those engineering examinations—and I will pass them—we'll go away together. I won't be anybody's servant then." (*He glances down at his livery in disgust.*)

MRS. BALDWIN—(*Pleading tearfully.*) "Fred, dearest, please take me away now—tonight—before he comes. What difference does the money make as long as I have you?"

FRED—(*With a harsh laugh.*) "You don't know what you're talking about. You'd never stand it.

Being poor doesn't mean anything to you. You've never been poor. Well, I have, and I know. It's hell, that's what it is. You've been used to having everything, and when you found out you were tied to a servant who could give you nothing, you'd soon get tired. And I'd be the last one to blame you for it. I'm working out and I don't want to go back and drag you with me."

MRS. BALDWIN—"You don't realize how much I love you or you wouldn't talk like that. I'd rather die of starvation with you than live the way I'm living now."

FRED—(*Shaking his head skeptically.*) "You don't know what starvation means. Besides, how do you know he'll get a divorce? He might keep you bound to him in name for years—just for spite."

MRS. BALDWIN—"No. I'm sure he isn't as mean as all that. To do him justice he's been kind to me—in his way. He has looked upon me as his plaything, the slave of his pleasure, a pretty toy to be exhibited that others might envy him his ownership. But he's given me everything I've ever asked for without a word—more than I ever asked for. He hasn't ever known what the word 'husband' ought to mean but he's been a very considerate 'owner.' Let us give him credit for that. I don't think"—(*She hesitates.*)

FRED—"Go on! Go on! I expect to hear you love him next."

MRS. BALDWIN—(*Smiling.*) "Don't misunderstand me. I simply can't think him the devil in human form you would make him out to be." (*Grimly.*) "I love him? It was my kind parents who loved his money. He is so much older than I am and we have nothing in common. Well, I simply don't love him—there's an end to it. And so—being his wife—I hate him!" (*Her voice is like a snarl as she says these last words—there is a pause.*) "But what is your plan?"

FRED—"When the time comes I shall go to him frankly and tell him we love each other. I shall offer to go quietly away with you without any fuss or scandal. If he's the man you think him—and I don't agree with you on that point—he'll get a divorce so secretly it will never even get into the papers. He'll save his own name and yours. If he tries to be nasty about it I know something that'll bring him around." (*Mrs. Baldwin looks at him in astonishment.*) "Oh, I haven't been idle. His past in none too spotless."

MRS. BALDWIN—"What have you found out?"

FRED—"I can't tell you now. It's got nothing to do with you anyway. It was a business deal."

MRS. BALDWIN—"A business deal?"

FRED—"Yes. It happened a long time ago."

*(Abruptly changing the subject.)* "What can be keeping him? What time did he say he'd be here?"

MRS. BALDWIN—"The telegram said 'for dinner.'" *(Suddenly with intense feeling.)* "Oh, if you knew the agony that telegram caused me! I knew it had to come but I kept hoping against hope that something would detain him. After the wire came and I knew he would be here, I kept thinking of how he would claim me—force his loathsome kisses on me." *(Fred groans in impotent rage.)* "I was filled with horror. That is why I asked you to take me away tonight—to save me that degradation." *(After a pause—her face brightening with hope.)* "It's getting late. Maybe he won't come after all. Fred, dear, we may have one more night together." *(He bends over and kisses her. The faint throb of a powerful motor with muffler cut out is heard. Fred listens for a moment—then kisses Mrs. Baldwin hastily.)*

FRED—"There he is now! I know the sound of the car." *(He rushes to the open door and disappears in the darkness.)*

MRS. BALDWIN—*(Springing tensely to her feet, runs over and unlocks the door to hall and opens it.)* "Oh God!" *(The noise of the motor sounds louder, then seems to grow fainter, and suddenly ceases altogether.)* "He's gone to the garage. They're meeting. Oh God!" *(She shrinks away from the*

door—then remains standing stiffly with one hand clenched on the table. Quick footsteps are heard on the gravel, then on the steps of the verandah. A moment later Arthur Baldwin enters from the hall. He comes quickly over to her, takes both of her hands and kisses her. A shudder of disgust runs over her whole body.)

(Baldwin is a stocky, undersized man of about fifty. His face is puffy and marked by dissipation and his thick-lipped mouth seems perpetually curled in a smile of cynical scorn. His eyes are small with heavily drooping lids that hide their expression. He talks softly in rather a bored drawl and exhibits enthusiasm on but two subjects—his racing car and his wife—in the order named. He has on a motor-ing cap with goggles on it and a linen duster, which he takes off on entering the room and throws in a chair. He is rather foppishly dressed in a perfectly fitting dark grey suit of extreme cut.)

BALDWIN—(Holding his wife at arm's length and throwing an ardent glance at her bare neck and shoulders.) "As beautiful as ever I see. Why you're all toggled out!" (With a half-sneer.) "Is it to welcome the prodigal bridegroom?"

MRS. BALDWIN—(Forcing a smile.) "Of course!"

BALDWIN—"And how has the fairest of the fair been while her lord has been on the broad high-

way?"

MRS. BALDWIN—"Very well."

BALDWIN—"Time hang heavily on your hands in this rural paradise?"

MRS. BALDWIN—(*Nervously avoiding his eyes.*) "The limousine has been out of commission—Fred has had to send away for some new part or other. I was rather glad of the opportunity to rest up a bit. You know when you're here we're always on the go. How's the car?"

BALDWIN—(*Enthusiastically.*) "Great!" (*He drops her hand and takes cigar out of box on table.*) "I made eighty-six about a week ago." (*Lights cigar.*) "Ran across eight straight miles of level road—let her out the limit. It's some car all right!" (*His enthusiasm suddenly vanishing—with a frown.*) "By the way, where's Fred?"

MRS. BALDWIN—(*Startled.*) "Wasn't he at the garage?"

BALDWIN—"No. No one was there."

MRS. BALDWIN—"He must have gone to dinner. We had all given you up." (*Anxiously.*) "Why do you want to see him?"

BALDWIN—"Because I was forgetting. The car isn't all right just now. I blew out a tire yesterday and went into a ditch—nothing serious. I backed out all right and everything seemed to be O. K. after I'd put on a new tire. She ran smoothly to-

day until I hit the road up here about six o'clock. That's why I'm so late—had the devil of a time making this hill—or mountain I should say. Engine worked fine but something wrong with the steering gear. It was all I could do to hold the road—and you know I'm no slouch at driving. I nearly ran into boulders and trees innumerable. All the people at the summer camp down the line were looking at me—thought I was drunk I guess. I had to just creep up here. If I'd have gone fast your hubby would be draped around some pine tree right now." (*With a laugh.*) "Sorry! You'd look well in black." (*Mrs. Baldwin starts guiltily.*) "I think I'll have to have this house moved into the valley. It's too much of a climb and the roads are devilish. No car, even if it has ninety horse power can stand the gaff long. I've paid enough for tires on account of this road to have it macadamized ten times over. Eaten yet?"

MRS. BALDWIN—"No. I wasn't hungry enough to eat alone. I'll have something light later on. And you?"

BALDWIN—"I had something on the way—knew I'd probably be too late up here."

MRS. BALDWIN—"Shall I have them get you anything?"

BALDWIN—"No. I'm not hungry."

MRS. BALDWIN—"Then if you don't mind I



think I'll go upstairs and take off this dress. I'm rather tired tonight. I'll be with you again in a short time."

BALDWIN—"Why the formality of asking? Have I been away as long as that? Make yourself comfortable, of course." (*With his cynical laugh.*) "I have only to humbly thank you for going to all this trouble. I assure you I appreciate it. You look more than charming."

MRS. BALDWIN—(*With a cold smile.*) "Thank you." (*Moving toward door.*) "You will find the letters I did not forward on top of the desk." (*She goes out.*)

BALDWIN—(*Going to desk and glancing over the letters.*) "Humph! There's nothing much here except bills." (*He throws them down and walks back to the table again. Gene, Mrs. Baldwin's maid enters from the hall and stands just inside the doorway, looking quickly around the room. Having assured herself that Baldwin is alone, she comes farther into the room and waits nervously for him to speak to her. She is a slight, pretty young woman of twenty-one or so neatly dressed in a black ladies-maid costume. Her hair and eyes are black, her features small and regular, her complexion dark.*)

BALDWIN—(*Glancing up and seeing her.*) "Why, hello Gene! As pretty as ever I see."

GENE—"Good evening, sir."

BALDWIN—"Are you looking for Mrs. Baldwin? She just went upstairs to change her dress."

GENE—"No, sir. I just left Mrs. Baldwin. She said she wished to be alone—that I was to tell you she had a headache but would be down later if she felt better. (*She pauses and clasps her hands nervously together.*)

BALDWIN—(*Looking at her curiously.*) "Anything you wish to see me about?"

GENE—(*A look of resolution coming into her face.*) "Yes, sir."

BALDWIN—(*Half-bored.*) "All right; what is it? Oh, by the way, before you begin can you tell me if Fred has gone down to the village tonight or not?"

GENE—"I'm quite sure he's over at the garage, sir."

BALDWIN—"I must phone to him about fixing the car—if he can. Can't use it the way it is. But what is it that's troubling you?"

GENE—"I hardly dare to tell you, sir."

BALDWIN—"I love to comfort beauty in distress."

GENE—"I know you'll be awful angry at me when you hear it."

BALDWIN—"You are foolish to think so. It's a love affair, of course."

GENE—"Yes, sir."

BALDWIN—"Well, who is the fortunate party and what has he done or not done?"

GENE—"Oh no, you're mistaken, sir. It isn't my love affair. It's someone else's."

BALDWIN—(*Impatiently.*) "You're very mysterious. Whose is it then?"

GENE—"It's Fred's sir."

BALDWIN—"But—I had rather an idea that you and Fred were not altogether indifferent to each other." (*Sarcastically.*) "You don't mean to tell me the handsome young devil has jilted you?"

GENE—(*Her voice harsh with anger.*) "He does not love me any more."

BALDWIN—(*Mockingly.*) "I shall have to chide him. His morals are really too corrupt for his station in life. My only advice to you is to find another sweetheart. There is nothing that consoles one so much for the loss of a lover as—another lover."

GENE—(*Trembling with rage at his banter.*) "I am well through with him. It's you and not me who ought to be concerned the most this time."

BALDWIN—(*Frowning.*) "I? And pray tell me why I should be interested in the amours of my chauffeur?"

GENE—(*A bit frightened.*) "There's lots of things happened since you've been away."

BALDWIN—(*Irritably.*) "I am waiting for you

to reveal in what way all this concerns me."

GENE—"They've been together all the time you've been away—every day and" (*Hesitating for a moment at the changed look on his face—then resolutely.*) "every night too." (*Vindictively.*) "I've watched them when they thought no one was around. I've heard their 'I love yous' and their kisses. Oh, they thought they were so safe! But I'll teach him to throw me over the way he did. I'll pay her for all her looking down on me and stealing him away. She's a bad woman, is what I say! Let her keep to her husband like she ought to and not go meddling with other people—"

BALDWIN—(*Interrupting her in a cold, hard voice and holding himself in control by a mighty effort.*) "It isn't one of the servants?" (*Gene shakes her head.*) "No. I forget you said she was married. One of the summer people near here?" (*Gene shakes her head.*) "Someone in this house?" (*Gene nods. Baldwin's body grows tense. His heavy lids droop over his eyes, his mouth twitches. He speaks slowly as if the words came with difficulty.*) "Be careful! Think what you are saying! There is only one other person in this house. Do—you—mean to—say it is that person?" (*Gene is too terrified to reply.*) "Answer me, do you hear? Answer me! Is that the person you refer to?"

GENE—(*In a frightened whisper.*) "Yes."

BALDWIN—(*Springing at her and clutching her by the throat with both hands.*) "You lie! You lie!" (*He forces her back over the edge of the table. She frantically tries to tear his hands away.*) "Tell me you lie, damn you, or I'll choke you to hell!" (*She gasps for breath and her face becomes a dark crimson. Baldwin suddenly realizes what he is doing and takes his hands away. Gene falls half across the table, her breath coming in great shuddering sobs. Baldwin stands silently beside her waiting until she can speak again. Finally he leads her to one of the Morris-chairs and pushes her into it. He stands directly in front of her.*)

BALDWIN—"You can speak again?"

GENE—(*Weakly.*) "Yes—no thanks to you."

BALDWIN—"You understand, don't you, that what you have said requires more proof than the mere statement of a jealous servant." (*He pronounces the "servant" with a sneer of contempt.*)

GENE—"I've got proof, don't you worry, but I don't know whether I'll show it to you or not. A man that chokes women deserves to be made a fool of."

BALDWIN—(*Stung by her scorn.*) "You will show me, damn you, or—" (*He leans over as if to grab her by the throat again.*)

GENE—(*Shrinking back in the chair.*) "Don't you dare touch me or I'll scream and tell them

all about it. I'll prove it to you, but it isn't because I'm afraid of you or your threats but simply because I want to get even with her." (*She reaches in under her belt and pulls out a closely folded piece of paper.*) "Do you recognize her writing when you see it?"

BALDWIN—"Give it to me."

GENE—(*Holding it away from him.*) "Will you promise to tell her—them—just how you found out—after I'm gone. I'm leaving tomorrow morning. I'd like them to know it was me who spoiled their fun. Will you promise?"

BALDWIN—"Yes! Yes! Anything. Give it to me!"

GENE—"There! Take it."

BALDWIN—(*He reads the letter slowly and a terrible expression comes over his pale, twitching features. Gene watches him with a smile of triumph. When he speaks his voice is ominously soft and subdued.*) "What night was this she speaks of?"

GENE—"The night before last."

BALDWIN—"She says she would come to him at half-past eleven. Did she mean to the garage?"

GENE—"Yes. When she thought we were all in bed in the back part of the house she would slip down and go out the front door. She kept on the grass and in the shade of the trees so no one would

notice her."

BALDWIN—"You know all this?"

GENE—"I followed her on several different nights."

BALDWIN—"You *must* hate her."

GENE—"I loved Fred."

BALDWIN—"Why was she so careless as to write this note? Couldn't she have telephoned or told him?"

GENE—"The little garage telephone was out of order. It was only fixed this morning. The Lynches were here to dinner and she had no chance to speak to him alone. She sent me to the garage to tell him to come over. When he came she pretended to give him some orders and dropped this at his feet. I suspected something, so I was watching and saw it all."

BALDWIN—"How did you get hold of this?"

GENE—"Yesterday when he went to the village to see if the new part for the limousine had come I went to the garage and found this in the inside pocket of his other clothes."

BALDWIN—(*His eyes narrowing.*) "He is very careless."

GENE—"Oh, they knew you wouldn't be home until to-day and they felt safe. And I knew you wouldn't believe me without proof."

BALDWIN—"Do you think he has missed this?"

GENE—"No." (*With a sneer.*) "As you say he is very careless in such matters. If he does miss it he'll think he has forgotten where he hid it."

BALDWIN—(*After a pause—putting the note in his pocket.*) "You may go. Be sure you do leave in the morning, otherwise—"

GENE—"You needn't fret. I wouldn't stay another day if you paid me a million." (*She yawns heavily.*) "Oh, I'm glad that's off my mind. I'll sleep tonight. I haven't slept a bit, it seems, since you've been away." (*She goes slowly to the hall door—then turns around and looks at him curiously.*) "What are you going to do?"

BALDWIN—"Go! Go!"

GENE—(*With a mocking laugh.*) "I wish you luck!" (*She goes out. Baldwin stares at the rug for a moment—then takes the note out of his pocket and reads it again. In a burst of rage he crumples it up in his hand and curses beneath his breath. His eyes wonder to his auto coat and goggles in the chair, then to the garage telephone near his desk. They seem to suggest an idea to him—a way for his vengeance. His face lights up with savage joy and he mutters fiercely to himself:)* "The dirty cur! By God, I'll do it!" (*He ponders for a moment turning over his plan in his mind, then goes over and shuts the door to the hall and striding quickly to the garage telephone, takes off the*



*receiver. After a pause he speaks, making his voice sound as if he were in a state of great anxiety:)* "Hello! Fred? You haven't touched the car yet? Good! Take it out immediately! Go to the village and get the doctor—any doctor. Mildred—Mrs. Baldwin has been taken very ill. Hemorrhage I think—blood running from her mouth. She's unconscious—it's matter of life and death. Drive like hell, do you hear? Drive like hell! Her life's in your hands. Turn the car loose! Drive like hell!" *(He hangs up the receiver and stands listening intently, with one hand on the desk. A minute later the purr of an engine is heard. It grows to a roar as the car rushes by on the driveway near the house—then gradually fades in the distance. Baldwin's thick lips are narrowed taut in a cruel grin.)* "Drive to hell, you b—rd!"

*(The stage is darkened. Half to three-quarters of an hour are supposed to intervene before the lights go up again.)*

*(Baldwin is discovered sitting in one of the Morris-chairs. He nervously pulls at the cigar he is smoking and glances at the telephone on his desk. There is a ring and he goes quickly over to it. He answers in a very low voice.)* "Yes. This is Mr. Baldwin. What? Ran into a boulder you say? He's dead?" *(This last question burst out exultingly—then in tones of mocking compassion.)* "How

horrible! They're bringing it up here? That's right. How did you happen to find him?—Quite by accident then?—Yes, come right to the house. It is terrible—awful road—Knew something of the kind would happen sometime—ever so much obliged for your trouble.” (*He hangs up receiver and opens door into hallway—then pushes the electric bell button in the wall. A moment later the maid enters.*)

THE MAID—“Yes, sir?”

BALDWIN—“Where's Gene?”

THE MAID—“She's gone to bed, sir. Shall I call her?”

BALDWIN—“No. You'll do just as well. Will you run up and tell Mrs. Baldwin I'd like very much to see her for a few minutes. Tell her it's something of importance or else I wouldn't disturb her.”

THE MAID—“Yes, sir.” (*She goes out. Baldwin walks over and fixes the two Morris chairs and lamp so that the light will fall on the face of the person sitting in one while the other will be in shadow. He then sits down in the shaded chair and waits. A minute or so elapses before Mrs. Baldwin appears in the doorway. She walks over to him with an expression of wondering curiosity not unmixed with fear. She wears a light blue kimona and bedroom slippers of the same color. Her beautiful*

*hair hangs down her back in a loose braid.)*

MRS. BALDWIN—"I'm sorry not to have come down before but my head aches wretchedly. I sent Gene to tell you. Did she?"

BALDWIN—(*With curious emphasis.*) "Yes. She told me. Sit down, my dear." (*He points to the other Morris chair—She sits in it.*)

MRS. BALDWIN—(*After a pause in which she waits for him to begin and during which he is studying her closely from his position of vantage in the shadow.*) "I really thought you had gone out again. That was one reason why I didn't come down. I heard the car go out and supposed of course it was you."

BALDWIN—"No. It was Fred."

MRS. BALDWIN—"You sent him to the village for something?"

BALDWIN—"No, I simply told him there was something wrong with the steering-gear—something I couldn't discover. I told him to attend to it—if he could—the first thing in the morning. It seems he has gone me one better and is trying to locate the trouble tonight." (*With grim sarcasm.*) "Really his zeal in my service is astounding."

MRS. BALDWIN—(*Trying to conceal her anxiety.*) "But isn't it very dangerous to go over these roads at night in a car that is practically disabled?"

BALDWIN—"Fred is very careless—very, very

careless in some things. I shall have to teach him a lesson. He is absolutely reckless" (*Mrs. Baldwin shudders in spite of herself*) "especially with other people's property. You are worrying about Fred; but I am bewailing my car which he is liable to smash from pure over-zealousness. Chauffeurs—even over-zealous ones—are to be had for the asking, but cars like mine are out of the ordinary."

MRS. BALDWIN—(*Coldly*.) "Why do you talk like that? You know you do not mean it."

BALDWIN—"I assure you I do—every word of it."

MRS. BALDWIN—"You said you wished to see me on something of importance?"

BALDWIN—(*Dryly*.) "Exactly, my dear. We are coming to that." (*Then softly*.) "I wanted to ask you, Mildred, if you are perfectly happy up here."

MRS. BALDWIN—(*Astonished*.) "Why—of course—what makes you ask such a question?"

BALDWIN—"Well you know I have left you so much alone this summer I feel rather conscience-stricken. You must be bored to death on this mountain with none of your old friends around. I was thinking it might be a good plan for us to economize a bit by letting Fred go and getting along with just my car. It would be quite possible then for you to go to some more fashionable resort where

things would be livelier for you."

MRS. BALDWIN—(*Eagerly.*) "I assure you I am quite contented where I am. Of course I miss you and feel a trifle lonely at times, but then I have the other car and you know I enjoy motoring so much."

BALDWIN—"Do you? You never seemed to care very much about touring round with me."

MRS. BALDWIN—"You drive so dreadfully fast I am frightened to death."

BALDWIN—"Fred is a careful driver then?"

MRS. BALDWIN—"Very careful."

BALDWIN—"You have no complaint to make against him?"

MRS. BALDWIN—"None at all. I think he is the best chauffeur we have ever had."

BALDWIN—"Why, I am delighted to hear that. I had an idea he was reckless."

MRS. BALDWIN—"He is always very careful when he drives me. As for the rest of the help, they are the average with one exception. I think I shall discharge Gene." (*Baldwin smiles.*) "She is getting so bold and insolent I can't put up with it any longer. As soon as I can get a new maid I shall let her go."

BALDWIN—"You may save yourself the trouble. She is going to leave tomorrow. She gave me notice of her departure when you sent her downstairs."

MRS. BALDWIN—(*Flushing angrily.*) “It’s just like her to act that way—another piece of her insolence. I suppose I’ll have to make the best of it. It’s good riddance at all events.”

BALDWIN—(*In the same, soft, half-mocking voice he has used during the whole conversation with his wife.*) “Do you suppose Fred will stay with us when he finds out?”

MRS. BALDWIN—(*Puzzled.*) “Finds out what? Why shouldn’t he stay?”

BALDWIN—“He is Gene’s lover—or was.”

MRS. BALDWIN—(*Growing pale—violently.*) “That is a lie!”

BALDWIN—(*As if astonished.*) “Why, my dear, as if it mattered.”

MRS. BALDWIN—(*Forcing a laugh.*) “How silly of me! It is my anger at Gene breaking out. But I am sure you are mistaken. I know Gene was very much in love with him but I do not think he ever noticed her.”

BALDWIN—“Now *you* are mistaken. He may not care for her at present but there was a time when—”

MRS. BALDWIN—(*Biting her lips.*) “I do not believe it. That was servant’s gossip you heard.”

BALDWIN—“It was not what I heard, my dear Mildred, but what I saw with my own eyes.”

MRS. BALDWIN—(*In an agony of jealousy.*)

"You—saw—them?"

BALDWIN—(*Apparently oblivious to her agitation.*) "In a very compromising position to say the least." (*Mrs. Baldwin winks back her tears of rage.*) "But that was long ago." (*Mrs. Baldwin sighs as if relieved.*) "Besides, what have these servant intrigues to do with us?" (*Mrs. Baldwin tries to look indifferent.*) "I was only joking about Fred leaving. In fact from what Gene said Fred already has some other foolish women in love with him. Only this time it is no maid, if you please, but the lady of the house herself who has lost her heart at the sight of his dark curls. The fellow is ambitious."

MRS. BALDWIN—(*Her face terror-stricken—her words faltering on her lips.*) "Do—you—know—who—this woman—is?"

BALDWIN—(*Watching her with grim amusement.*) "I have one of her letters here. Would you care to read it?" (*He takes her note from his pocket and gives it to her.*)

MRS. BALDWIN—(*Taking it in her trembling hand and smoothing it out. One glance and her face grows crimson with shame. She seems to crumple up in her chair. After a moment she throws her head back defiantly and looks up at him—a pause.*) "Well?"

BALDWIN—(*Dryly, his voice softly menacing.*)

"Well? You do not know how to play the game, my sweet Mildred. If ever guilt was stamped on a face it was on your's a moment ago."

MRS. BALDWIN—(*Her eyes flashing.*) "Yes. I love him! I acknowledge it."

BALDWIN—"You are better at affirming than denying. It takes courage to proclaim oneself the mistress of one's chauffeur—to play second-fiddle to one's maid!"

MRS. BALDWIN—(*In a fury.*) "You lie! He is a man and not the beast you are."

BALDWIN—(*Softly.*) "Be calm! You will awaken your rival and she will listen and gloat!"

MRS. BALDWIN—(*Lowering her voice to a shrill whisper.*) "Oh, it was she who stole that letter?"

BALDWIN—"Exactly. You are a novice at the game, my dear. Take the advice of a hardened old sinner—in the years and loves to come never write any more letters. Kisses come and kisses go, but letters remain forever—and are often brought into court."

MRS. BALDWIN—(*Relieved at the easy way he takes it.*) "I cannot help this. I love him—that's all." (*Pause.*) "What are you going to do?"

BALDWIN—"It was to tell you that, I sent for you."

MRS. BALDWIN—"You will get a divorce?"

BALDWIN—"No."



MRS. BALDWIN—"You will keep me tied to you when you know I do not love you?—when you know I love someone else?" (*In pleading tones.*) "You will not be as hard on me as that, will you, Arthur? This is not all my fault. You have never really loved me. We are not the same age." (*Baldwin winces.*) "We do not look at things in the same light—we have nothing in common. It would be needless cruelty to both of us to keep up this farce. You will not keep me tied to you for mere spite, will you?"

BALDWIN—(*In his kindest tone.*) "No. What I intend to do is to let you get a divorce. I will give you all the evidence you need. Could I be fairer than that?"

MRS. BALDWIN—(*Staring at him as if she could not believe her ears.*) "You will do that? (*She rushes over and kneels at his feet, kissing his hands and sobbing.*) "Oh thank you! Thank you!"

BALDWIN—(*Looking down at her bowed head with a cruel smile.*) "There! There! It is no more than just. I realize that youth must have its day. You should have trusted me."

MRS. BALDWIN—(*Her voice thrilling with gratitude.*) "How could I dream that you would be so kind? I did not dare to hope that you would ever forgive me—and he was certain you would think only of revenge. Oh, how unjust we have been to

you!" (*She takes one of his hands in her's and kisses it.*)

BALDWIN—"It is true neither of you have given me due credit for being the man I am, or you would never have acted as you did. I have known from the first it must have been for money you married me—" (*With a twisted smile.*) "An old man like me. Tell me the truth. Wasn't it?"

MRS. BALDWIN—(*Falteringly.*) "Yes. I would not lie to you now. My family forced me into it. You must have realized that. I hardly knew you, but they were nagging me night and day until I gave in. It was anything to get away from home. Oh, I am sorry, so sorry! Will you forgive me?"

BALDWIN—(*Evading her question.*) "I have done my best to make you happy. I have given you everything you desired, have I not?"

MRS. BALDWIN—"You have been very good, very kind to me. I have tried to love you but there has always been a gulf separating us. I could never understand you."

BALDWIN—"I have trusted you, have I not—always and in everything?"

MRS. BALDWIN—(*Slowly.*) "Yes, but you have never loved me. I have been just a plaything with which you amused yourself—or so it has always seemed to me. Perhaps I have been unjust to you—in that too."

BALDWIN—"If I have regarded you as a plaything I was only accepting the valuation your parents set upon you when they sold you. But these things are over and done and it is useless to discuss them. Let us talk of the present. You love Fred?"

MRS. BALDWIN—"Yes, I do."

BALDWIN—"I will not stand in your way. You shall have him."

MRS. BALDWIN—(*Getting up and putting her arms around his neck.*) "Oh I do love you now—you are so good to me." (*She kisses him on the lips. He does not move or touch her in any way but looks at her coldly with half-closed eyes, his thick lips curled in a sneering smile. In sudden fear Mrs. Baldwin moves away from him with a shudder. The noise of an automobile is faintly heard. Baldwin springs to his feet, his face transformed with savage exultation.*)

BALDWIN—(*With a hard laugh.*) "Thanks for that Judas kiss. I hear a machine coming. It is Fred, I know. We will have him in and relieve his mind by telling him of our agreement." (*The machine is heard coming slowly up the drive toward the house.*)

MRS. BALDWIN—(*Frightened by Baldwin's change of manner.*) "It does not sound like your car."

BALDWIN—"It is Fred, I tell you. I know it is Fred." (*The car stops before the house. The horn sounds. Baldwin hurries to the door leading into the hall. Several persons can be heard coming up the steps to the verandah. A door is opened and shut and the hushed murmur of voices comes from the hallway.*)

BALDWIN—"In here if you please—in here!" (*Mrs. Baldwin moves closer to the door, her face wan with the terror of an unknown fear. Three men, one a chauffeur, the other two servants of some description, enter carrying the dead man. Two are supporting the shoulders and one the feet. A dark robe is wrapped around the whole body. They hurriedly place it on the divan to which Baldwin points and go out quickly, glad to be rid of their gruesome task. Mrs. Baldwin is swaying weakly on her feet, her eyes wildly staring at the figure on the divan. Suddenly she gives a frantic cry and rushing over pulls the covering from the dead man's head. The livid countenance of Fred is revealed. Several crimson streaks run down his cheek from his clotted, curly hair. Mrs. Baldwin shrieks and falls senseless on the floor. Baldwin who has watched her with the same cruel smile on his lips goes slowly over and pushes the button of the electric bell.*)

BALDWIN—(*When the maid appears.*) "Help me

to get Mrs. Baldwin to her room." (*He picks up the prostrate woman in his arms and with the assistance of the maid, carries her out to the hallway. They can be heard stumbling up the stair to the floor above. A moment later Baldwin reappears, breathing heavily from his exertion, his pale face emotionless and cold. He stands looking down at the dead body on the divan—finally shrugs his shoulders disdainfully, comes over to the table, takes a cigar out of the box and lights it. The maid rushes in, all out of breath and flustered.*)

THE MAID—"Please go upstairs, sir. Mrs. Baldwin has come to, and she ordered me out of the room. I think she's gone mad, sir. She's pulling out all the drawers looking for something" . . . (*A dull report sounds from upstairs. The maid gives a terrified gasp. Baldwin is startled for a moment and starts as if to run out to the hallway. Then his face hardens and he speaks to the trembling maid in even tones.*) "Mrs. Baldwin has just shot herself. You had better phone for the doctor, Mary."

### CURTAIN





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